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EXTRA SERIES

IV.: *Eden's Fourfold River*

EDEN'S FOURFOLD RIVER

An Instruction on Contemplative Life and Prayer

Written for
The Monks of Witham Charterhouse, Somerset
(*circa* A.D. 1200)

Edited with an Introduction
by
A MONK OF PARKMINSTER

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INTRODUCTION

IF there was joy before the angels that kept watch and ward over the widowed church of Lincoln when, on St Matthew's Day, 1186, in Westminster Abbey Church, Hugh of Avalon, prior of Witham Charterhouse in Somerset, was consecrated bishop of that see, the day brought no less sorrow to the monks he had left behind him down there in the West Country. Only six years before he had arrived in their midst from the Mother House of the order to find them housed—if that were the term—in huts of wattle and daub; he left them lodged in a stone-built monastery where everything, though simple, had that regularity of outline which formed a framework for their inner lives. But the material success of his priorship was but the rind of the fruit. The monks of Witham for six years had had a saint for prior, with all which that must have meant for them, and now suddenly he had been torn from their midst and carried far off to other tasks. All the wide plain of Mercia stretched between their house on the Mendips and the great church that

was building on its hill at Lincoln, while the point nearest to them of their erstwhile prior's immense diocese, at Oxford, was a long way off by the travelling of those days. Like the Ephesians with St Paul, *they were grieved that they should see his face no more.**

But the monks at Witham were not left orphaned for long. Once more the community of the Grande Chartreuse sent forth one of its best members to tend the new offshoot in England, and Bovo was his name. There was a certain fitness in their choice of him as the new prior, since his had been the prevailing voice in the council of the house that had decided them to lay the burden of the episcopate on St Hugh.† And, of course, upon arrival at Witham, he must have found old friends in most of the members of the community; but there were newcomers as well in the choir stalls; a slow trickle of native recruits into the first English Charterhouse had already begun. There was Robert, lately cathedral prior of Winchester,‡

* Acts xx 38.

† Le Vasseur, *Ephemerides Ord. Cartus.*, t. iv, p. 463; and Thurston, *Life of St Hugh of Lincoln* (Quarterly Series), p. 87.

‡ The list of priors of Winchester given in Dugdale (*Monasticon Angl.*, London, 1817, vol. i, p. 200), though it names three Roberts, does not seem to leave room for this one. But the list is probably imperfect.

and Radwin, sacrist there, who had left their royal monastery to end their days in deeper retreat from the world. Adam, Premonstratensian abbot of Dryburgh,* came from his Border abbey to spend the evening of his days—it turned out to be a long one of twenty-five years!—amongst the Southern folk; and there were others of lesser ecclesiastical renown.†

Up till this time, tradition, that lodestar

* If he is to be identified with Adam the Scot, whose works are printed in Migne's *Latin Patrology* (tom. 198), as Miss Thompson thinks (*A History of the Somerset Carthusians*, London, Hodges, 1895, p. 72), a good deal of explanation is needed, since in Migne he is said to have been abbot of Whitherne (Candida Casa) and bishop of Galloway, while there is no mention of Dryburgh nor of his having joined the Carthusians.

In a further list of his works written after he became a Carthusian (Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 74) there appears one entitled *The Fourfold Discipline of the Cell*. A copy of the present work? There is room here for investigation.

† Miss Thompson (*op. cit.*, p. 71) makes all these enter at Witham under Bovo's successor, Albert. But since Adam died in 1210, after twenty-five years of Carthusian life, he must have joined while St Hugh was still prior. Another, but unsuccessful, candidate whom she mentions in the same connection, Walter, prior of Bath, returned thither and died in 1198 (*op. cit.*, p. 76), two years before Bovo left Witham on his return to the Grande Chartreuse, where he died shortly afterwards, *circa* 1200 (Le Couteulx, *Annales Ord. Cartus.*, tom. iii, p. 280).

for Carthusians of all ages, had kept the nascent community on its heavenly way. But now a new generation was growing up to whom the Grande Chartreuse was an honoured name rather than a stirring memory. Bovo, we may suppose, wished to have some written document which could be put into the hands of new-comers as an authoritative exposition of the central ideal of Carthusian life, "that purity of inward contemplation which chiefly pertaineth to the solitude of the cell."* He wrote, therefore, to the Grande Chartreuse begging that such a work should be undertaken, and the result was that *Liber de Quadripertito Exercitio Cellae* (*A Book of the Fourfold Discipline of the Cell*), of which the following pages, under another title, are an abstract and summary.

If this much is clear—as the reader will see from the *Dedication*†—the identity of the writer, "*an unworthy servant of God and God's servants*," remains a mystery still. There is no tradition as to its authorship in his order; the few manuscripts of any age that are known preserve the writer's anonymity;‡ Père Chifflet, S.J., who first printed the text in his *Solitaries' Manual*,§ attributed

* Migne, *P.L.*, t. 153, col. 810. † *Infra*, p. 1.
‡ *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique*, v. 136.
§ *Manuale Solitariorum*, Dijon, 1657.

it with a "perhaps" to Wigo II, ninth prior of the Grande Chartreuse; but this was pure conjecture. In default of external evidence, what does the book itself tell us? Simply this: that the writer was a Carthusian and lived at the Grande Chartreuse; that in some way he was Bovo's "ghostly son"; that he was yet young in the order, which is not the same as young in age—all this appears clearly in the text. Chifflet and others have remarked something authoritative in the writer's manner of addressing the priors assembled for the General Chapter, whence they conclude that he was someone in authority—perhaps Wigo, the ex-prior living in retirement. This may be so, but we must not forget that, first of all, very humble folk may sometimes write with a high tone of authority, even to their superiors, when they feel that God's honour or their neighbour's good demands it. Secondly, it should be known that the position of simple monks of the Grande Chartreuse towards the General Chapter of their order has always been a special one. It is they, and not the Chapter, who elect their prior, who is its ex-officio president. Certain acts of the Chapter, such as a new statute tending to lessen the rigour of the order's observance, would be subject to their approval before it could come into force. Simple monks

of the Grande Chartreuse, equally with the assembled priors, are eligible both as electors of the Diffinitory and members of that body into which the effective power of the Chapter passes as soon as it is constituted. This might well explain a certain tone of authority or assumption of equality with the priors attending the Chapter, in one who was himself not in office, but simply a member of the community at the "Mother and Mistress of all Charterhouses." Be that as it may, all we know for certain is that the *Fourfold Discipline of the Cell* was written between the years 1186 and 1200 by someone at the Grande Chartreuse who had been Bovo's pupil in the religious life; beyond that we must be content to leave the author as nameless as the little wooden cross in the Carthusian graveyard left him after death.

The *Liber de Quadripertito Exercitio Cellae* is a lengthy document filling some eighty columns of close print in volume 153 of Migne's *Latin Patrology*. The thirty-six chapters, into which the author divides his work, fall by a natural division into two main themes. In the first, he treats of the advantages and delights of Carthusian life, and especially the charms of its solitary cells (chapters i-xiv). In the second part, he goes on to speak of the means of dwelling there profitably, so as to gain all the spiritual

benefits to be reaped from such a life (chapters xv-xxxvi). This he develops under four heads, or chief "exercises of the cell," in which the solitary should engage: Reading, Meditation, Prayer, and Work. These he finds betokened by the four rivers of paradise, spoken of in the second chapter of Genesis.

It is this part of his work, mainly, upon which we have drawn for the present edition, under the title of EDEN'S FOURFOLD RIVER. What we have done is this: first of all, as far as was possible in such a document, we have omitted all that had reference to things purely Carthusian—such as details concerning attendance at the General Chapters of the order. Then, for the rest, we have exercised severe compression, especially by shortening long parallels drawn from the mystical sense of Holy Scripture, which, however beautiful, are somewhat outside the range of a modern reader's interest. Some metaphysical passages have been altogether passed over, since those who could follow them would probably prefer to read them in the original Latin. We have not been unmindful of the well-known saying about translators, but we hope that we have not betrayed the author's meaning anywhere; sometimes we have almost paraphrased his text to make the meaning clearer, but no-

where have we added to it, not even a brief phrase.

For Carthusians, of course, EDEN'S FOURFOLD RIVER is as fresh and actual as the day it was penned; and it is interesting as showing the type of spiritual instruction offered to the earliest English Carthusians. But neither of these considerations has urged the drawing out of the present version. It is meant as a contribution to practical piety at this present time. Now, at first sight, what seems less likely than that a code of spiritual discipline, drawn up seven hundred years ago for solitaries "dwelling in their cells," should contain anything practical for men and women in the world of to-day? We believe that this unbidden objection arises from the mistaken notion that there is a difference in *kind* between the spiritual life as led in a monastery or hermitage and that of people in the world; whereas, the difference is really one of *degree*.

"What," it may be asked, "is the resemblance between the spiritual needs of a man in this troubled post-war world, hurrying hither and thither in the scramble to make a living, and the unperturbed peace of a recluse on the outskirts of Selwood Forest in the twelfth century?" There is this, and it is almost everything, that both the one and the other feel the need of a certain amount

of *solitude of body and mind*, in order to grow in nearness to God. "It by no means follows that a very busy man may not be a contemplative," says Bishop Hedley. "There do exist elevated and perfect souls in whom action rather enhances contemplation than interrupts it. . . . With most men, however . . . for a contemplative life there must be solitude and silence."* This is a law of the spiritual life. The modern Retreat Movement is one of its witnesses. A man who buries himself in a cell as a Camaldolese or Carthusian monk, or takes refuge in the silent cloisters of a Cistercian abbey, on the one hand, and a harassed city worker who plunges for a brief moment during the dinner hour into the peaceful twilight of, say, St Mary Moorfields, or the ancient crypt of St Etheldreda's in Ely Place, have this in common, that both in their degree are following the lead of a divine instinct, and obeying the universal law of prayer laid down by our divine Lord himself: *When thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee.*† Recognition of this need will be an enormous help to those who, in a garish world, are striving to reach

* *Prayer and Contemplation*, C.T.S., p. 52.

† Matt. vi 6.

or to practise contemplative prayer; and whether the inner chamber with its shut door be actually a place set aside for prayer at home, or a retired corner in church, or some wind-swept lonely spot on the Downs, it is there that they will find God, just as a Carthusian finds him in his cell.

When we turn to the individual "exercises" proposed to the "dweller in his cell" as the means of his perfection, there is no difficulty in seeing how applicable they are, again in their degree, to people who have to live amidst the bustle of "the world."

The first of them—*lectio*, "ghostly reading"—is hardly sufficiently translated by the modern "spiritual reading," or perhaps it would be truer to say that it is spiritual reading supremely well made. Wigo in his *Customs* supposes that the Carthusian monk is provided with two books at a time* for his reading. His warning to keep them from getting soiled, since "books are the never-failing nourishment of our souls," shows the reverence with which he regarded the precious codices, not only for their own sakes, but for God's message to the soul which they might contain. There is something particularly solemn in the way in which St Benedict provides a special book for Lent for each of his monks, to be given out *in capite Qua-*

* Cap. xxviii, Migne, *P.L.*, t. 153, col. 694.

dragesimae, at the beginning of Lent.* When the book chest in the east cloister† was opened and the volumes distributed to the assembled monks there must have been a sense of solemnity, something like that supreme moment of synagogue worship, when the books of the law are taken out of the "Ark" and carried up to the high place to be read; something like it, but better, for it might be that the volume that fell to an individual was that wherein the law and the prophets find their fulfilment, the Holy Gospels.

Are we spiritually better off nowadays with our multitude of books than were the old monks with the comparatively small number of volumes, collected with difficulty or copied by hand, that went to make up their libraries? We wonder very much. In any case, there is one thing in which their descendants to-day, in common with all "ghostly livers," can imitate them, and that is, to read, as St Benedict would have us, *per ordinem, ex integro*,‡ consecutively and straight through; slowly, too, and prayerfully. Haste and speed are here as hurtful to progress as anywhere in the spiritual life. We can imitate them, too,

* *Rule*, ch. 48.

† Clark, *The Care of Books*, Cambridge University Press, 1902, p. 70.

‡ *Rule, loc. cit.*

in our choice of books, seeking after older writers, for the most part, and, as one of the saints used to recommend, those authors whose names begin with the letter S—the saints.

In conclusion, the reader will notice that our author supposes always that Holy Scripture will be put in the first place as a matter for "ghostly reading." What jewels —hidden riches, alas! for many—are there not contained within that divine treasury of prayer! To mention one point only: a man of prayer who has reached the stage of "forced acts," or has been thrown back upon it, will never find himself at a loss if he is familiar with the book of Psalms. But we believe that happier days have dawned already in this respect, and that Holy Scripture is assuming more and more its rightful place in the devotional life of the Church at large.

In coming to the second river, which is marked "Meditation," the first thing for the modern reader to do is to jettison the latter-day, confined meaning which the word has come to have. Here meditation embraces all those parts of the mechanics, so to say, of prayer, in which the intellect plays the chief rôle, right up to the point where "discourse" ceases before God's direct action on the soul, just as the moon pales

away at sunrise. Notice that our author proceeds in orderly fashion by the now traditional threefold stage of purgative, illuminative, and unitive way, in the matter he sets out for meditation—that is, for thought.

There is here one point we should like to raise by way of question. Why is his chapter on *acedia** and its remedy where it is ?† He does not name the thing, but there it is, described to the life. Indeed, from Cassian's time onwards, no treatise on prayer seemed complete—nor would it have been—unless this " valley of the shadow of death " in the land of prayer were mentioned. May it not be that we have here—in many cases, at least—the effects of the " night of sense," as described by St John of the Cross ? And when this state was not rightly understood, as occurs even after the " Mystic Doctor " has written so full a diagnosis of it, may it not have happened that souls, in which God was really making his action felt, owing to ignorance of what was taking place within them, grew discouraged, and through want of knowing how to act, did really fall into a state of torpor, of *acedia*, and finally of wilful spiritual sloth ? Be that as it may, St John of the Cross has

* *i.e.*, spiritual sloth.
† *Infra*, ch. ix.

mapped out this land of "darkness and misery" with so much clearness that it is a man's own fault if he go astray now.

The third river is Prayer. For our author, as for every monk, prayer culminates in the divine office, the *Opus Dei*, in which the thoughts and aspirations garnered during moments of silent personal communion with God are caught up on the strong-beating rhythmical wings of plainsong and borne aloft to join the unending Trisagion of the angels. Between such "institutional" prayer and the soul's private communings with God there is no real opposition at all; far from it, they are complementary one to the other. For such personal heart-to-heart converse with God is the best safeguard against the solemn recurring round of the liturgy degenerating with time and custom into a dull matter of routine, while in their turn the impersonal modes of liturgical prayer, the sinking of identity in the choir of a community, provide a remedy against those revivals of "self"—dead elsewhere in his spiritual life—which take place, by the irony of events, in a man's inmost sanctuary of prayer. This will generally arise from some want of balance in the mechanism of the spiritual life, a balance which a Carthusian, among others, has provided for him by his cell and by the choir. The prayer

of his cell which was *My* God and *my* all, in choir broadens out into a deeper melody, *Our* Father who art in heaven. Every word, every note of music, each hieratic movement, is laid down meticulously for his observance; there is no room for "self" here. Even when it falls to his lot to *execute the priestly office in the order of his course before the Lord*,* as hebdomadary, and he passes vested down the choir between the ranks of his brethren, all, even the prior, bow to him and he to none, *propter Personam quem tunc repraesentat*,† on account of the Sacred Person whom he then represents, then most of all does puny "self" sink down before the greatness of that Eternal Priesthood in which he participates.

Here, it is true, the layman in English-speaking lands will find it difficult to follow our author even from afar, so distant have we grown from the liturgical spirit. Few are they anywhere in the world to whom access to cathedral or monastic choirs is open, even if they had the necessary leisure to avail themselves of such a spiritual privilege. But with us, such occasions are almost non-existent. However, the heart of the liturgy is with the Church everywhere, for liturgy is not the same thing as pomp and ceremony, though it does demand order and seemliness.

* Luke i 8.

† *Ordinarium Ord. Cartus.*, ch. xxxv, No. 5.

In this sense a low Mass, celebrated with the bare necessaries laid down by the law of ritual, is truly liturgical, and if a solid foundation could be laid among us of assisting thereat in the Church's spirit—that is, by following either with book or eye what is going on at the altar—we should have the beginning of that liturgical revival which is so long overdue. All lovers of prayer will aim at making the most of any opportunity that is given them of using the consecrated forms of prayer that the Church uses, and this is now possible as regards holy Mass by those editions or translations of the missal which have brought it within the means of everyone. From that it should be but a step to inaugurate what we might call the minimum of liturgical observance, when the people of a parish, gathering round their parish priest on Sunday for a Mass that is truly *pro populo*, shall not merely "hear" it or "assist" at it, but actively participate in it. They will raise their voices in chant and response, and, we may hope, in fulfilment of the Church's earnest wish, partake sacramentally of that sacrifice they have materially helped to offer. People who do this will come back later in the day to offer their evening sacrifice of praise by the singing of vespers, and then that reproach would be removed from our Lady's own dower

that nowhere, practically, throughout its length and breadth, is her *Magnificat* ever heard, save in the rifled shrines of the old faith, now in the hands of an alien religion.

To a certain number of readers, after these high things of prayer, it will come as something of an anti-climax to read that the fourth river of this contemplative paradise is "Work." "What," they will ask, "about the *purely* contemplative life?" There is no such thing in this world; a life of absolute contemplation without intermission is only to be led by the blessed in heaven. That fact once grasped, it is easy to see that the amount of "activity" and its character must be determined by the circumstances of the "contemplative" in this world. Work is a necessary component of the contemplative state, and for two reasons. First of all, the law of work falls on the contemplative along with the rest of the sons of Adam. True, the "work" he is set to do may be intellectual; but that will bring the second reason into play. Any form of life that is mainly sedentary requires a corrective in the nature of some sort of bodily activity, if mind and spirit are to be kept healthy. The reader will see from what our author lays down,* quoting Wigo's *Customs*, that Car-

* *Infra*, p. 95.

thusians of those days had hit upon a form of work that was, we may say, mildly intellectual, and at the same time one of considerable labour—the transcription of books, and all that gathered round that craft. But Wigo, after providing for the accoutrement of the scribe in the fullest fashion, shows in one last sentence that he, too, had recognized that occasionally something more stirring would be needed by the contemplative. He has told of the pens, ink, and paper; of the scalpels and bodkins, pumice-stone, and the rest of it; and then ends with the laconic sentence: *Ad opera vero dolabrum* (But for work, an axe).*

Those who are trying to lead a life of contemplation in the world will likely enough cry out that for them there is no need of a corrective against an over-sedentary form of life; rather the contrary, that what they need is more rest and quiet. That may well be so. But let them take the work they have to do in the spirit in which the Fathers of the desert wove their palm-leaf baskets and mats—even if only to burn them at the end of the year—and Carthusians patiently sat at their desks copying manuscripts; let them take it as part of their spiritual "grind," and not as a hindrance to their soul's well-

* *P.L.*, t. 153, col. 695.

being, and they will see that "all things work together unto good."

But we are keeping our readers too long from entry into the paradise of contemplatives which this monk of old describes for them. It is the present writer's prayer that EDEN'S FOURFOLD RIVER, which for long centuries has watered the garden enclosed of the Charterhouse, may spread its waters abroad over the wide plain of the world. May it be a *pool of Siloe** to give sight to blind eyes through "ghostly reading." May the Shepherd of souls himself lead many of his flock amidst *green pastures*, and make them rest beside its *still waters*† of meditation. May its stream be parted, like another Jordan at the touch of priests' feet,‡ as, with chant and psalm, they carry the Ark of the New Covenant enshrining the manna of the Christian Exodus into its midst, and souls pass over scatheless into the Promised Land of contemplative prayer. And when, as must happen at times, the soul, *panting as a hart after the water brooks, is cast down and disquieted*, may *deep call upon deep at the noise of its flood gates* of work, drowning the mocking voices of its enemies as they ask, *Where is now thy God ?*§ In a word, may the reader of this little book be *like a tree which*

* John ix 11.
† Ps. xxii 1, 2.
‡ *Cf.* Jos. iii 14-17.
§ Ps. xli.

*is planted near the running waters, which shall bring forth its fruit in due season,** to God's honour and worship, the joy of the whole company of heaven, and his own great and everlasting comfort. Amen.

ST HUGH'S CHARTERHOUSE,
PARTRIDGE GREEN,
SUSSEX,
Feast of St Hugh, 1926.

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* PS. i 3

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EDEN'S FOURFOLD RIVER

DEDICATION

TO the most reverend LORD and most dear FATHER in Christ, BOVO, prior of the *Poor of Christ*, professed of the Carthusian order, who dwell at WITHAM, an unworthy servant of God and of God's servants, his ghostly son, wisheth the merit of sanctity here and the reward of felicity hereafter.

Were it lawful for a son to strive with his father in judgement—a servant with his master—somewhat, revered FATHER, should my littleness have, methinketh, wherewith not unjustly to accuse your greatness. For, lo! while that your potent authority meditateth what it may be lawful to impose upon me, watchful discretion halteth to consider what my impotence may bear. This it was that made that great preacher Paul declare that though *all things were lawful to him, yet not all things were expedient*.*

Thus do I write in preface, since your FATHERSHIP hath laid on me the command

* 1 Cor. vi 12.

to essay, by writing, a description of those special exercises whereby he that is professed of the Carthusian order and dwelleth in a cell should remain there in solitude, and should not go forth therefrom, except under stress of reasonable causes, such as are laid down expressly, according to the tenor of the said order.

A useful work—as verily I do not deny—but only for him that is capable thereof. For I am not ignorant of my unmeetness therefor, I who know the honey to be sweet more by hearsay than by taste. Nevertheless, calling to aid—as reason commendeth—the witness of Holy Writ, I have here tried, as far as in me lay, to write concerning those things that are the very essentials of our order, especially those that are holy exercises of religion to which a dweller in his cell should apply himself.

Which foresaid exercises are four in number—to wit:

Application to ghostly reading;
Intensity of clear meditation;
Piety of pure prayer;
Diligence in useful work;

—these four; but the greatest of these is Prayer.

May your beloved FATHERSHIP in our Lord, then, receive this my gift, small indeed

in bulk, but offered to you with no small affection; and should you find therein but little that may win your approval, vouchsafe notwithstanding to accept the good will of the giver.

I beseech you furthermore that, as I have fulfilled your mandate—not indeed as I should, but as I could—you would grant me this recompense for my travail, that you would be pleased to have me in mind in your orisons, and that the reward of my prompt obedience be the instance of your prayers to God for me.

May almighty God, through his beloved Son and in the Holy Ghost, defend your venerable FATHERSHIP from all evil, dispose your days in peace, and withhold you from eternal damnation, and make you to be numbered in the company of his elect. *Amen.*

PROLOGUE

IN WHICH DIVERS EXERCISES, OUTWARD AND INWARD, VERY NECESSARY FOR GHOSTLY LIVERS, ARE DESCRIBED; AND OF THE RIVER OF EDEN

*A RIVER went out of Eden to water paradise.** What, think we, may be conveniently understood of this *paradise*, according to the sense called figurative, by which it is our intention to go forward? Understand by it that sublime sweetness in God and that sweet sublimity which cometh of that order in which we have made profession; unless, indeed, some other sense to thee seem better, truer, and more convenient; though of a truth, if there be a man that thinketh otherwise, it must be by God's revelation. Yea, to us it seemeth that in the meantime we may hold to our interpretation until so be that a better is given. For we have before our eyes this twofold good of sweetness and sublimity in quality and quantity, whence we have been bold so to think of it. And not only to think of it,

* Gen. ii 10.

but, even if but rarely and but in slight measure, have we had experience thereof.

Now the first number of this twofold good consisteth in these three things: in outward exercise, in continual solitude of the cell, and in entire renunciation of the world. And so, among other benefits, many and great, which are found in our order—which we have likened to the foresaid paradise—are these:

Goodly outward exercise;
Continuous solitude of the cell;
Perfect renunciation of the world;

—these three; but the greatest of these is solitude.

In order that we may touch, even shortly, upon the first of these great benefits, we shall assign to outward exercise the qualities of poverty, austerity, and frugality; poverty in the habit thou bearest, austerity in the wearing of haircloth, frugality in victuals.

So there is poverty and austerity in thy habit. What do such things suggest to thee save those two great benefits and gifts only to be had of God—to wit, lowliness of heart and mortification of body? Poverty belongeth to humility and austerity to mortification. The one represseth the uprisings of elation in the mind, the other destroyeth the filth of sinful corruption, for these be

the two chief fetters wherewith, in evil-doers, the old enemy bindeth mankind. But in his elect, he that was born of a humble and immaculate Virgin, the lowly Mediator between God and man, came to break those fetters, which is shown clearly in his Cross and death. *Let us condemn him to a most shameful death*,* they said. This is the voice of the Jews plotting the death of our Saviour. Inasmuch as thou hearest them condemning him to death, understand by it austerity; for what is more austere than death? And inasmuch as they purpose and deliberate that his manner of dying shall be not shameful only, but most shameful, thou shouldst know that thereby is to be understood his Cross; for what more shameful death was there than the cross? Yea, the cross was the most ignominious of deaths. And so the Son of God was obedient to the Father unto death; and as if that were not enough, the Apostle addeth, *even to the death of the cross*.† In suffering such a death for us he showed forth as in a figure for us that death in himself, which thou mayest see not unfitly figured in thy habit. For the poverty of thy habit, as hath been said, showeth forth humility, and its austerity denoteth mortification.

* Wisd. ii 20. † Phil. ii 8.

Yea, furthermore, frugality in victuals offereth resistance to the " Prince of Cooks "* lest he destroy the walls of Jerusalem; a frugality very necessary for us, for how true is that which Solomon saith: *He that nourisheth his servant delicately from his childhood, afterwards shall find him stubborn.*†

To possess such and so great a good, is it not in some wise to possess paradise? For thereby art thou lifted up above the world, concerning a lover of which our Lord said that he was *clothed in purple and fine linen, and feasted sumptuously every day.*‡ In his purple thou hast glowing colour, in colour beauty, in beauty brilliancy, in brilliancy vanity, and in vanity pride. In his fine linen observe thou softness, in softness comfort, in comfort desire of the flesh; desire begetteth a thrill, and thrill bringeth delectation, and in delectation is luxury. So, then, by his purple there is shown that he was lifted up by pride, and by his fine linen that he was lustful. And since that, not merely now and then, on occasion, but that *every day he feasted sumptuously*, note that he was given to belly cheer.

But with you it is not so; rather would I liken you to the beggar Lazarus, for beggary carries with it the idea of poverty; and in

* Apparently the devil is here meant!

† Prov. xxix 21. ‡ Luke xvi 19

that he was *full of sores* not falsely do we declare him, in this respect, to have lived in austerity. For he, to whom were not given *so much as the crumbs that fell from the table of him that feasted sumptuously every day*, was far removed from that latter man.

After this we must take heed to that second benefit which we have attached to this spiritual paradise—to wit, continuous solitude of the cell. And verily I trow him not to have departed from the truth who nameth this perpetual solitude of the cell a paradise. For why should I fear to call the cell a paradise when it is clear that it is heaven itself? For what meaneth the word *cella* (the cell), but *coeli aula* (the court of heaven)?* Truly the Lord is in the cell, since it *is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven.*† Therein is the up-going and down-coming of angels upon the Son of man by the ladder of charity. Do we speak with exaggeration or in flattery? God forbid.

How terrible is this place.‡ Nothing is truer. Terrible to the fiend; terrible to the world; terrible to the unrighteous man.

* For a similar etymological conceit, *cf. Epistola ad Fratres de Monte Dei* (*P.L.*, t. clxxxiv, col. 314), where the writer plays, in quite untranslatable fashion, upon the similarity of sound between the words *coelum* (heaven), and *cellam* (a cell).

† Gen. xxviii 17 ‡ *Ibid.*

*This is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven.** This is that special place of God's dwelling wherein is heard *the voice of a great commotion, saying : Blessed be the glory of the Lord, from his place.*† From this place many great rivers take their rise; but one great and special river floweth therefrom to water your paradise. No participation, company, or covenant hath this river with those others of which the psalmist speaketh to our Lord: *Thou hast dried up the rivers of Ethan ;*‡ nor with those of which Habacuc speaketh to God and saith: *Thou wilt divide the rivers of the earth ;*§ much less those that are named *Abana and Pharphar, rivers of Damascus.*‖ More truly might it be likened to the river called Jordan, after washing in which Naaman the Syrian was made clean,¶ or the waters of Siloe, after bathing in whose pools did the man born blind receive sight.** Or it may be likened to that river of which St John, writing in the seventh vision, saith: *And he*—an angel it was—*showed me a river of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.*†† For that the throne of God and of the Lamb be a place of incomprehensible

* Gen. xxviii 17.
† Ezech. iii 12.
‡ Ps. lxxiii 15.
§ Habac. iii 9.
‖ 4 Kings v 12.
¶ *Ibid.*
** John ix 7.
†† Apoc. xxii 1.

pleasure, there is none that would or could gainsay.

This is that river that floweth forth from Eden to water paradise; whence *it is divided into four heads*, for thus saith Holy Writ.* And if no better meaning may be shown therefor, we shall refer these *four heads* unto so many exercises of ghostly religion, in which consisteth the whole tenor of our order.

And these are:

Reading;
Meditation;
Prayer;
Work.

For at all times when we are not called away from them by some bodily necessity—the which we are compelled to serve so long as we live here on earth—we ought to be found engaged in one of these four occupations, and that with all strenuousness. Unless with all diligence and without interruption we are careful to engage in these four exercises of holiness, we may not dwell in our cells with profit.

But now let us see what Holy Writ saith of these four heads: *The name of the one is Phison . . . the name of the second is Gihon*

* Gen. ii 10.

. . . *the name of the third river is Tigris . . . and the fourth river is Euphrates.* Of Phison it is said that *it compasseth all the land of Hevilath;* of Gihon, that *it compasseth all the land of Ethiopia;* and of Tigris, that *it passeth along by the Assyrians.** But of Euphrates it saith not that it compasseth any land, or whither it goeth, but only it saith that *the fourth river is Euphrates.* Is aught of all this said purposelessly? By no means. Therefore, let us dwell somewhat on each of these four rivers.

* Gen. ii 10-41.

I

OF THE FIRST RIVER, THAT IS CALLED PHISON

CHAPTER I

OF THE MEANING OF THIS NAME, AND OF GHOSTLY READING

PHISON is said to mean *mouth of the pupil*. If this be so,* just as sight may be understood of the *pupil* of the eye, so, too, speech is figured by the word *mouth;* for the tongue wherewith we speak is within the mouth, and in the eye is the pupil whereby we see. Now where do we see that which is true, so as not to stumble in the darkness of untruth, unless it be in the studious reading of Holy Writ? And when, by concession of our order, we come together to talk on festival days, whence, I ask you, should we draw our conversation unless it be from the things that our reading of Holy Writ hath embraced?

Rightly, then, by *the mouth of the pupil* is studious reading of Holy Writ expressed, wherefrom shineth forth the light of truth and whereby we come to the brightness of lightsome knowledge. Of the first of these

* "Phison, according to the Hebrew, is said to mean fertility or abundance" (Denys the Carthusian, *Op. omn.*, t. i. p. 77). *Cf.* Ecclus. xxiv 35.

St Peter telleth in his second epistle where he saith: *We have the more firm prophetical word, whereunto you do well to attend, as to a light that shineth in a dark place.** And of the other, holy David, speaking to the common Lord and Master of all, saith: *Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my paths.*†

Thou, therefore, O servant of God, that dwellest in thy cell alone—but not alone art thou there—if thou shouldst understand with full knowledge all things pertaining to Holy Writ, thy mind will come to a certain great clearness of sight. And when it shall be permitted to thee to speak, if thou take heed to occupy thy tongue with such subjects, not only shalt thou be inwardly enlightened in sight, but outwardly, too, thy speech shall be pure and beautiful. Thus verily, indeed, not without reason mayest thou interpret *Phison* as *mouth of the pupil*, by which, as we have said, we may understand ghostly reading, in that by its means thou gettest so much light in thine interior, and, outwardly, truth in thy speech, unto thine own and thy hearers' welfare. Away, away once and for all with garrulity when, on festival days, thou openest thy mouth to speak in the cloister; for this is not becoming to gravity and seriousness. Wert thou,

* 2 Pet. i 19. † Ps. cxviii 105.

upon speaking, to break out into buffoonery and much speaking, it would not appear that thou wert much given on other days to studious reading, pure meditation, and heart-felt prayer, and specially if, through a bad custom, thou shouldst give way to heated debate and contention, for all such words are quite foreign to those ghostly exercises wherewith thou shouldst occupy thyself in thy cell. Remember that Truth himself hath said: *Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgement.** And again he saith: *By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*† Lo, how carefully thou shouldst guard thyself from incurring that which would condemn thee.

On this subject, the Father, guide, and counsellor of monks, the blessed Bennet, writeth thus in his *Rule for Monks:* "But as for buffoonery or silly words, such as move to laughter, we utterly condemn them in every place, nor do we allow the disciple to open his mouth in such discourse."‡ Know, my most dearly beloved, thou dweller in thy cell, that such stories and jests as are almost always heard from the lips of many worldly persons, in religious men and specially in Carthusians, are blasphemies. Verily,

* Matt. xii 36. † Matt. xii 27. ‡ Cap. 6.

as our Lord saith: *A good man out of a good treasure bringeth forth good things.** If there be laid up in thy heart a treasury furnished by burning love and continued exercise of reading, meditation, prayer, and useful work, one or other of them would move thee to speak. Acting in this fashion, thine inward senses will be enlightened and thy tongue will utter charmed words; and both these benefits are furnished thee by studious ghostly reading; whence, not without hidden meaning, is *Phison* interpreted as *mouth of the pupil.*

Furthermore, such studious ghostly reading, aforementioned, teacheth us how we may *sing to the Lord a new song*,† and ever give birth to newness of holy living, since *Phison compasseth all the land of Hevilath.*‡ In this beginning of new holy living is gotten the gold of true wisdom; and the gold of that land—no other than Hevilath—is *very good.* The gold, then, that *groweth in the land of Hevilath* is not only good, but very good, when a holy soul, inwardly enlightened by studious reading, giveth forth naught in speech but what is pertinent unto edification. And this is the name *Phison;* and thus doth it *encompass all the land of Hevilath, where gold groweth, and the gold of that land is very good.*

* Matt. xii 35. † Ps. cxlix 1. ‡ Gen. ii 11

II

OF THE SECOND RIVER, THAT IS CALLED GIHON

CHAPTER II

OF THE MEANING OF THIS NAME

NOW the name of the second river is *Gihon*, which, when it floweth forth, *compasseth all the land of Ethiopia*. This is *Meditation*, which, by its resistance, valiantly and prevalently breaketh whatever is of Ethiopic blackness pertaining to sin, before that it can defile the soul by consent to it. For when a godly soul enroundeth itself on all sides with the purity of internal meditation, no temptation, however violent soever it be, hath power to bring it into subjection by gaining its consent thereto, if as soon as temptation beginneth knocking at the door of the heart, it were wholly occupied with pure meditation.

Therefore, thou that dwellest in thy cell, even as studious reading pleaseth thee—which is Phison, which compasseth all the land of Hevilath, where the gold is very good—when thou drinkest of its waters, so also let Gihon—pure meditation—also please thee, which encompasseth all the land of Ethiopia. For it will be but too dangerous for thee to give forth again by writing that

which thou hast drunk in of Phison by reading, unless at the same time thou drinkest of Gihon by meditation. For just as to read and not to understand is neglectful, so, after having read, to forget what thou hast understood, what is that but altogether to lose that which thou hast acquired by reading and understanding?

CHAPTER III

OF DIVERS KINDS OF MEDITATION

MEDITATION is manifold in kind; and just as the kinds of which we purpose to speak are diverse, so do they beget divers movements in the soul of him that meditateth.

In the first place we put that manner of meditation that begetteth erudition.

In the second, that which begetteth sorrow and fear.

In the third place we put that which is an occasion of love and consolation.

In the fourth the mind perceiveth subjects of pity and compassion.

From the fifth there ariseth a source of discretion and abjection.

In the sixth place we set that manner of meditation from which there cometh to the soul a movement of renewal and reparation.

Then followeth the seventh, from whence there cometh the gift of wonder and admiration.

We set down as the eighth manner that by which there are turned over in the mind things invisible and ghostly.

And, further, we set down that manner of meditating by which a mind that is sober and holy, and free, not only from every unholy affection, but entirely free and far removed from even useless thoughts, by a vision neither simply ghostly nor rational, but rather intellectual, perceiveth amidst ghostly truths, Truth himself. This blessed height whereunto a pure mind cometh in God is no longer simple meditation, but may well be called high contemplation. In which state the holy and enlightened mind transcending all material things and corporeal images and likenesses, in the light of Truth itself—in which, verily all things are, past, present, and future—doth contemplate whatsoever Truth hath revealed, all together, always and in like manner, by a simple intuition.

Now, hereinafter, thou that dwellest in thy cell, hear certain points pertaining to the foresaid matters more fully and more perfectly expressed.

CHAPTER IV

OF THE FIRST MANNER OF MEDITATION

FIRST of all, then, that I may speak unto thee of that first manner of meditation, sitting within thy cell, let thy mind run over all the books of Holy Writ; let thine intelligence accompany thy silent musing and rehearsal thereof, and with thy mind thus enlightened, think to thyself—yea, in the depths of thy mind—of those things contained in the books of the law and the prophets, likewise the historical books. Survey that which is contained in the books of the New Testament, of the Evangelists and the Apostles, as also the narratives of Catholic doctors. Betake thee in thought from the world's beginnings, through its variations, in what has been done and said in the six states, the three periods, and the two, from the time of Christ's Incarnation until these lees of the years that now be, to all those doings that pertain to Christ, to his Apostles, to the martyrs, confessors, and virgins. What a babel of sound there is in every one of these things in thy heart in the midst of thy silence! When thou musest upon each and every one of such doings within thee, oughtest thou to be said to be alone in thy cell? By no means art

thou then solitary, since, while that thy mind is busily intent on these things, all those folk who are spoken of in the Old and New Testament, and all those of whom mind is made in the writings of the Fathers that were after the Incarnation, are, in some manner, with thee present.

CHAPTER V

OF THE SECOND MANNER OF MEDITATION, WHICH BEGETTETH SORROW AND FEAR

To this manner of meditation succeedeth the second; and it is one, thou that dwellest in thy cell, which specially pertaineth to thee.

Sitting alone in thy cell, recount unto thyself *all thy years and days in the bitterness of thy soul.** Turn and turn over again in thy mind what great sins thou hast committed, the place, the time, with what force of will and intention, and for how long thou hast stayed therein.†

Consider and reconsider within thee, that thou art weak in body and in soul; how prone thou art to vice, but languid towards virtue.

* Isa. xxxviii 15.

† But "sins of youth and of past years . . . must not be dwelt upon in detail . . ." (Hedley, *A Retreat*, p. 69).

And since it were too long a process—yea, altogether impossible for us—to enumerate all those calamities which man suffereth both outwardly and inwardly, consider, in conclusion of all, how thou art like unto *them that go down into the pit*;* and that unless the free-given grace of thy Creator were at hand, thou shouldst, in temptation, be like wax is before burning coals, or the lightest dust before a mighty wind.

After this, let thy meditation represent to thy mind *how terrible* is the Creator of all things *in his counsels over the sons of men*,† neither lessening the evil wrought by the reprobate nor accepting their good deeds; yea, more, by a just judgement, instead of softening their hearts, rather doth he harden them lest they should be converted and he should heal them.‡

Bethink thee of that which the *Preacher* saith: *There are just men and wise men, and their works are in the hand of God; and yet man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred*,§ but all is laid up for the future.

Put before thy mind's eye, after that, the going forth of thy soul from thy body, depicting to thyself how terrible will then be

* Ps. xxvii 1. † Ps. lxv 5.
‡ *Cf.* Isa. vi 10 and John xii 40.
§ Eccles. ix 1.

that moment; wherefore, ought it to be no little cause of dread to thee now? That moment of departure will indeed come, but the time of its coming is altogether unknown, as a certain man said of himself: "I shall go forth, but I know not when nor where"; nor, verily, can any soul hope for a return to the body, according to that true sentence of a holy man, which is this: *Man, when he is fallen asleep, shall not rise again till the heavens be broken; he shall not awake nor rise up out of his sleep.** The soul abandoneth the body, and in that abandonment causeth the body to die; that goeth forth which was invisible, and there remaineth that which is seen, but with pain.

Let thy meditation now turn otherwhere, and, as far as thou mayest, let it foresee the presentation of thy soul, now gone forth from the body, before the bar of the terrible and strict Judge. For the Apostle saith: *We must all be manifested before the judgement-seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the proper things of the body, according as he hath done, whether it be good or evil.*† One Man alone there was who walked without blemish; he alone was *free among the dead*;‡ he alone could say: *The prince of this world cometh, and in me he hath not anything*,§ for there is none

* Job xiv 12.
† 2 Cor. v 10.
‡ Ps. lxxxvii 6.
§ John xiv 30.

of the rest of us in whom he findeth not something that is his.*

Furthermore, turn thine eye of consideration inwardly, and think what will become of thy body after that the soul shall have departed therefrom. No great travail of mind shalt thou have in figuring this meditation for thyself; for the sight of any body will advise thee what thou oughtest to think thereon. For go to the tomb of whomsoever thou wilt; open it and gaze within. If thou doest so, because of the horror that will fall upon thee from the sight thou beholdest and the stench that is there, thou wilt be able to bear neither; nay, not for one moment. Verily, the corpse there laid within shall appear horribly stinking, reeking with rottenness, rotting with worms; and even unto a like pass shall come this body of ours of which we speak, so that after the soul's passing thence there will arise a stench, and after stench rottenness; to rottenness will succeed worms, and to worms, dust, viler, filthier, and more fetid than all other dust.

Thy meditation—thou dweller in thy cell—about which I speak to thee, already fore-

* " If anyone shall say that a man once justified . . . can avoid all sin, even venial, during his whole life, *except by special privilege* from God, as the Church holds concerning the *Blessed Virgin*, let him be anathema" (Council of Trent, sess. vi, can. 23).

shadoweth something of that general uprising of the dead which is to come, when, at the day of doom, the King of kings, the Judge of quick and dead, shall appear. Yea, he will come *to judge in great power and majesty ;** he will come who came heretofore in meekness and lowliness to be judged. And when he shall come, as verily he hath promised he will do, *all his angels shall come with him,*† and all nations shall be gathered before him. Then shall he say to the righteous, to those that are to be saved: *Come, ye blessed ;*‡ but to the unrighteous destined to be damned: *Depart from me, ye cursed.*§ To the former he will say: *Possess ye the kingdom ;*‖ but to the latter: *Depart into everlasting fire.*¶ This meditation customably maketh long tarrying in the soul, portraying there—yea, deep engraving there within—the great terror of the Judge who shall then appear to lay bare all secrets.

Hereinafter, let thy meditative thought skirt round and oversee *the land that is dark and covered with the mist of death ; a land of misery and darkness, where the shadow of death and no order, but everlasting horror dwelleth.*** See in that land the everlasting pains of the

* Matt. xxiv 30.
† Matt. xxv 31.
‡ Matt. xxv 34.
§ Matt. xxv 41.
‖ Matt. xxv 34.
¶ Matt. xxv 41.
** Job x 21, 22.

reprobate, the infernal pit where shall be unquenchable fire, the worm that dieth not, and where, to sum up countless things in a few words, naught that is good shall be present, naught that is evil be absent.

So this second manner of meditation is divided into these eight points, wherein there is cause of fear and sorrow.

But we will, furthermore, to repeat these eight divers meditations, shortly, in order that thou mayest keep them the more straitly in mind, and when thou listest, ponder upon them within thee.

The first is of the excesses, many and immeasurable, that we have damnably committed in thought and deed.

The second, of the miseries beyond measure and number that we bear in soul and body.

The third, of that most hidden and most strict judgement given once for all, in which God, the just and all-seeing Judge, fixeth his eye upon his reprobate rational creature.

The fourth, of that terrible hour of dissolution, when the body is separated from the soul and the soul from the body.

The fifth is the thought of being haled before the bar of the Judge, when a man so shall then appear even as he goeth forth from this life.

The sixth is of the hurrying of the body,

now void of the soul, to the tomb in which it is committed, earth to earth.

The seventh is of the general resurrection of the dead, and that great assize at which there shall be gathered the whole of mankind; of the terror which the Judge's appearance shall inspire in the reprobate; of the promulgation of his terrible sentence, which is this: *Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.**

The eighth is of the torments of the foresaid reprobate, damned for ever.

These considerations, to the number of eight, which we have here set before thee, thou dweller in thy cell, pertain to that manner of meditation which we have placed second, and of which we have said that it rouseth sorrow and fear. These are those considerations which, if thou give good attention to them, pierce and strike, beat and lash, wound and torture; they provoke to compunction and excite tears.

Furthermore, this manner of meditation, which we have set forth under eight heads, giveth unto thee, that dwellest in thy cell, some sort of burning affection, just as the former led thee to a certain lightsome and clear understanding; and though both kinds be very good, this latter is the more necessary for thee, since the first instructeth thee, but this latter moveth thee; the former showeth

* Matt. xxv 41.

thee great riches, this latter bringeth thee to their possession. And verily, just as the former standeth in need of the latter, lest thou be puffed up by vain elation, so doth the latter call for a third manner of meditation, lest thou be too much overset by horror and desperation.

CHAPTER VI

OF THE THIRD MANNER OF MEDITATION, WHICH BRINGETH LOVE AND CONSOLATION

THOU dweller in thy cell, since thy mind findeth naught in that second manner of meditation which were not matter for sorrow—yea, of great bitterness—lest thou be engulfed by a deeper melancholy when thou thinkest upon these things, it will be well for thee if thou represent to thyself somewhat that is joyful and sweet to thee, in order to lessen that foresaid bitterness.

The third manner of meditation, then, representeth interiorly in thy mind how much sweetness and pity there is in God, what clemency and goodness, *that he is sweet to all,** that *his mercies are above all his works,*† he, *the Father of mercies and God of all consolation, who consoleth his own in all their tribulations ;*‡ that *as a Father hath com-*

* Ps. cxliv 9. † *Ibid.* ‡ 2 Cor. i 3.

*passion on his children, so hath he on all them that fear him.**

And let thy chiefest meditation turn upon this: that he *spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all,*† that Son who so loved us as to wash us clean from our sins in his blood; that he was, for our sakes, clothed in our flesh, condemned to the cross, and done to death thereon. And thinkest thou that he that suffered so much for thee will give thee over? God forbid that thou shouldst so think of him. How many that have strayed farther from him than thou hast done hath he not called back again? For it is his fashion that *where sin hath abounded, he should make grace abound the more.*‡ Yea, I affirm it, *as far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed their iniquities from them,*§ making that in them good which heretofore was evil, and where injustice was, now merit and grace in sin's stead.

This, thou dweller in thy cell, is that third manner of meditation of which I spake unto thee, and which giveth occasion and is cause of love and consolation, even as the former, the second, giveth cause of fear and sorrow. And very meet it is that this third should come after that manner given first of all, forasmuch as that the second above rehearsed

* Ps. cii 13.
† Rom. viii 32.
‡ Rom. v 20.
§ Ps. cii 12.

taketh away the risings of elation, so likewise this third manner should remove all horror of desperation begotten by that second manner. And thus, in these twain manners of meditation, the second and the third, thy soul may break forth in song to God, not of mercy alone, lest rash presumption lift it up over high, nor yet only of judgement, lest deadly desperation overwhelm it; but of both mercy and judgement together,* neither turning to the right by foolish mirth with vain hopes, nor to the left by trembling on the brink of damnable desperation.

CHAPTER VII

OF THE FOURTH MANNER OF MEDITATION, WHICH BRINGETH PITY AND COMPASSION

THE fourth manner of meditation is that from which, thou dweller in thy cell, thou shouldst draw pity and compassion. And truly it is meet that this fourth manner should follow after the third aforesaid, which bringeth thee consolation—namely, that thus filled with consolation, when thou see any man, of whatsoever estate he be, afflicted with trouble or contaminated by the filth of sin, that thou shouldst rather be swift to compassion than

* *Cf.* Ps. c 1.

to judgement, and show thyself prompt to consolation rather than to reprobation.

This do we say, since they who outwardly bear the habit of religion—whether they be monks or clerks regular, dwelling in monasteries, or, like us, anchorites or hermits dwelling alone (and would we were alone!)—when they see somewhat that displeaseth them—and we when we see the same—keep not discretion before our eyes nor have aught of compassion. And just as the foresaid religious men are more prone to judge than to compassionate, so likewise and oft do we act in like fashion.

But whereunto dost thou that art hidden away in a nook of thy cell judge others? Shall I liken thee to a ravening wolf? Nay, rather in that case art thou to be likened to a biting flea. Verily, if thou couldst see thyself with a clear eye, naught else but thyself would appear blameworthy; and then it would turn out that, while thou shouldst attend to the greatness of thine own sins, others' would appear to thee more tolerable; so that if thy zeal be fully tempered, it could never exceed in measure.

Therefore, thou dweller in thy cell, when thou hearest or seest evil to be wrought by certain persons, while zeal and right urge thee to their reprehension, let also pity and compassion draw thee to make excuses for

them. So that when thou seest some wrong done, think it to arise from infirmity, deception, or accident. Excuse the intention of the doer if thou canst not excuse his deed. And if that which thou seest scarcely admit of any excuse, suppose in that case that temptation hath been too violent for the doer thereof. Thus, when thou seest anyone that lieth sick of soul, his sickness shall be displeasing to thee, but pleasing he that lieth sick, not, indeed, inasmuch as that he lieth sick, but only he that lieth sick shall be pleasing to thee. Thus shalt thou love him as a man but hate him as a sinner, which love for him should be not in so far that he is a sinner but as a man. In this manner, in those evils that come before thee in men, neither zeal nor compassion shall be lacking unto thee; and for source both of one and the other, the beginning, the middle, and the end shall be charity, in due order.

CHAPTER VIII

OF THE FIFTH MANNER OF MEDITATION, WHENCE ARISETH SELF-CONTEMPT AND ABJECTION

FROM the fifth manner of meditation there ariseth a source of self-contempt and abjection, and it cometh about in the following manner: Constant experience hath taught

thee, thou dweller in thy cell, that it is certain thou canst not be without temptation. If that be true which was spoken by the holy man Job: *The life of man upon earth is a warfare** —yea, since it is true—how can temptation ever be absent from thee so long as thou livest upon this earth? Therefore, when thou shalt be no longer upon the earth, thou shalt then at length know that never before wast thou free from temptation, since that thou art free from it then for the first time.

But now the flesh tempteth thee, the world tempteth thee, and that old enemy of mankind tempteth thee. The flesh essayeth to lead thee to its pleasures, the world to its vanities, the devil to that of which he himself is full—to wit, pride and arrogance. But do thou, then, when thou feelest somewhat of these foresaid temptations to be nigh unto thee, sitting in thy cell alone, place thine own self before thine eyes, and with inward meditation thereof, see and con over with what devices thou canst despise these temptations and put them far from thee.

When the flesh speaketh tempting thee, give no ear to its wanton voice, but without delay command it to be silent; and do so in this manner. Consider how impure and filthy

* Job i 7.

is that body thou bearest; how unclean and short-lived all its delights, since after a brief span it is to be given over to death. And when the traitorous deceiver presenteth before thy mind's eye some bodily form of evil in order to drag thee to consent in its unlawful and wicked pleasure—which hath in it death—consider not that which is placed before thee as it seemeth outwardly, but rather that which it verily is. Thou shalt see that it is, as it were, a sack outwardly well garnished, but inwardly full of filth, uncleanness, and horrible stinking carrion; and thus shalt thou *take and dash the little ones of Babylon against the rock.**

When the world approacheth its unclean lips to thine ears, suggesting to thee that vanity of which it is full, consider that all its heights of honour are but as smoke, and that all its glory tendeth most swiftly downwards to a shameful end. When thou seest anyone *highly exalted and lifted up like the cedars of Libanus*, pass thou by *and lo, he is not.*† For his glory endureth but for a short while and his joy is in a point. *If his pride mount up even to the heavens and his head touch the clouds, in the end his pride shall be buried as in a midden, and they that saw him shall ask: Where is he? As a dream that*

* Ps. cxxxvi 9. † Ps. xxvi 35.

*fleeth away he shall not be found; he shall pass as a vision of the night.**

Furthermore, in order to drown the voice of that crafty false fiend, the devil, nothing, methinketh, more powerful may be opposed to him than the summit of all perfection of sanctity in our Saviour, which had its abode in his heart, was set forth in his speech, and shown in his deeds. If thou keep ever before thy mind's eye the fulness of holiness of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the abundance of the devil's naughtiness shall be brought to naught in thy heart. For even if it be allowed to him to pour anything deadly into thy heart, it will be in such fashion that, when it hath been so poured, that abounding sanctity will bring it to naught in thy mind, if full and perfectly, by pure meditation, with devotion and love, he hath perseveringly remained with thee.

This is that meditation which is the source of a certain goodly self-contempt and abjection, which teacheth thee to think lowly of thyself and to cast far from thee whatsoever would whisper in thine ear—the flesh of filthy thoughts, the world of its unstable vanities, or our chiefest enemy of utter perdition.

* Job xx 6, 8.

CHAPTER IX

OF THE SIXTH MANNER OF MEDITATION THAT IS SET AGAINST "ACEDIA," THAT FALLETH UPON GHOSTLY LIVERS

THOU dweller in thy cell, to thee I say, that the sixth manner of meditation pertaineth to those things in which there is occasion of rekindling of fervour and renewal of spirit, which thou shouldst think of thus: There seizeth upon thee oftentimes, when alone in thy cell, a certain sluggishness, a dulness of mind, and weariness of heart; thou feelest a certain deep distaste within thee; thou art become burdensome to thyself, and that inward sweetness, which so happily thou wast wont to have, hath gone from thee. The comfort that was of yesterday and the day before is changed into bitterness, and the fount of tears, with which thou wert used so plentifully to be bedewed, is all dried up. Ghostly verdure hath withered away and comeliness hath clean departed. Thy thoughts within thee are sad and embittered, and thou hast not wherein thou canst find quiet rest. Reading hath for thee now no savour; prayer is no longer sweet; thou findest not thine accustomed tears in thy ghostly meditations. What more need we say? There abideth in thee nothing of

cheerfulness, eagerness, nor ghostly mirth. Ah, but thou art prone to laughter, to much speaking, and to idleness; but to silence, to useful work, and to all ghostly exercises, how slow and unwilling! Oh, what a miserable change of purpose! No longer art thou now what thou wert, but wholly changed art thou.

But arise, *shake thyself from the dust, and loose the bonds from off thy neck.** Endeavour to restore thyself who art thus divided against thyself; and, putting off the old man, strive with all thy might to be renewed in spirit. How may I perform this, dost thou ask? Hearken and understand how thou mayest be able to accomplish it. Represent, ghostly, before thy sight, those great labours thy fellows who have gone before thee underwent in time, and the mighty harvest of reward they have reaped in eternity. Join stave to stave in the inner tabernacle of thy heart, and set upon them golden rings, that the house of thy mind may stand firm and waver not;† for stave is joined to stave when virtue is joined to virtue. Lo, how the prince of the Apostles joineth stave to stave in his second epistle, where he saith: *Minister in your faith virtue, and in virtue knowledge, and in knowledge abstinence, and in abstinence patience, and in patience godliness, and in godliness love of brotherhood, and in love of*

* Isa. lii 2. † *Cf.* Exod. xxvi 26.

brotherhood charity.* How much this banding together of staves profiteth he showeth when he addeth: *For if these things be with you and abound, they will make you to be neither empty nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*.†

But upon these foresaid staves thou must set golden rings; that is, thou must have in mind what great rewards they have now gained; for gold signifieth splendour, and by a ring—inasmuch as neither beginning nor end can be discovered in it—is shown perpetuity. Of these staves thus linked together, and their golden rings, the Psalmist doth make mention after this fashion: *They shall go from virtue to virtue, the God of Gods shall be seen in Sion*.‡ To go from virtue to virtue pertaineth unto the staves; to see the God of Gods in Sion, to the golden rings.

Go thou, therefore, and, in the first place, set thy mind's eye upon the Saint of all saints, Jesu, who is thy Head and that of all the elect, and show thyself thus to be wise, according to the words, *the eyes of a wise man are in his head*.§ Behold him, then, conceived without stain, born, wrapped in swaddling bands, and laid in a manger; see him fed at his mother's breast and subjected to the law of circumcision. Lo, he appeareth

* 2 Pet. i 5, 7.
† 2 Pet. i 8.
‡ Ps. lxxxiii 8.
§ Eccles. ii 14.

as a mortal man, and yet, to the Magi's faith, as God eternal, the almighty King. Behold him presented in the temple, led away into Egypt with his mother, and brought back again into the land of Jewry; there see him growing in wisdom, age, and grace. Look thou; he is baptized, he fasteth, is a-hungered, and is tempted. He dwelleth among men, is wearied from the way, and goeth in and out, everywhere holily. Behold him at his miracle-working and at his godly preaching. See him lowly kneeling at his disciples' feet to wash them, and how he giveth them the sacrament of his Body and Blood. In his agony he prayeth the longer and sweateth a sweat of blood. He is sold, bought, betrayed by a kiss, and taken with swords and clubs. Behold how he is scourged, given over to scorn, clad in a red rag, and mocked by Herod and his army. See him as he beareth his cross, and how he is cruelly fastened thereto with nails; they revile him with hard words, and give him vinegar to drink. Watch him as he giveth up the ghost, commending his soul into his Father's hands. See how his side is rent by a soldier's spear, whence issueth blood and water. He is buried, and despoileth hell, bringing death itself down to the grave. Lo, he riseth and showeth himself to his disciples and eateth with them. He ascendeth on high, whence he came,

though he left not off dwelling there when he came hither upon earth, nor yet departed hence when he returned thither.* Thus shalt thou *have eyes in thy head.* And I trow that if inwardly thou wilt con over all the foresaid and other like things with due devotion and holy compunction, thou wilt overcome in great part that foresaid torpor.

Though it were over long—yea, impossible—to renew the memory of each of that army of martyrs that have suffered for Christ, yet, as far as in thee lieth, recall their admirable passions and the triumphs they have won in both sexes and in all ages. Add likewise to that the honour-worthy behaviour of the holy confessors, who, although they went not forth from this life in shedding their blood by open martyrdom, nevertheless led a life not far distant from that of right martyrdom.

If thou wert to dwell on all these things, I trow thou shouldst be lightened at once of that heavy torpor which weigheth thee down; and thus unburdened and made merry, thou shouldst find in thyself a renewed readiness of spirit.

Seek refuge, therefore, when there shall arise a loud tempest in the sea of thy heart, and, casting from thee the silent storm and stormy silence that horribly maketh tumult

* St Aug., *Sermo* cviii, *P.L.*, t. 38, col. 632.

within thee, rouse the blessed Jesu, who is a *helper in due time in tribulation*,* and pray him that he would lend his aid in thy distress. Rising up in the driven and reeling barque of thy soul, all wave-covered and nigh unto sinking, he will command the winds of temptation and the heaving deep of that most bitter sea, and there will come a great calm.

CHAPTER X

OF THE SEVENTH MANNER OF MEDITATION, WHICH BEGETTETH WONDER AND ADMIRATION

THE manner of meditation which I have put in the seventh place, thou dweller in thy cell, is that wherein, when thou abidest for a while, procureth thee wonder and admiration. If thou desire to have it in that sort, it behoveth thee to betake thee to thy solitude, and there to still thy thoughts and free them from all alloy. Then thou must con over the ages and divers generations that are from the world's beginning unto this time in which thou now art, and diligently give heed to the marvels the wondrous Maker and Contriver of all creation hath wonderfully ordered.

* Ps. ix 10.

Bethink thee how, without any exception, all that which is beside him, the Maker, hath been brought into being at his nod; that *he that liveth for ever hath created all things together*,* and yet how that likewise is true which saith, *in the beginning God created heaven and earth.*† But between these two, consider that there is no contrariety. For visible creation first of all appeared in some rude and shapeless mass pertaining to the four elements, which are fire, air, water, and earth; whence in the space of six days it was reduced to form.

So, if thou busily consider within thyself the creation of unformed matter, its production into form, and the setting in order of that form; the creation of the first man, his instruction, and his redemption after the fall; the six ages and all that came to pass therein, I trow that matter of wonder and admiration will not be lacking unto thee.

Touch and hearken unto these things in thy meditation, for thy mind hath a certain sense of touch, a certain sense of hearing, but both ghostly in kind, for the mind is a ghostly work. This ghostly touch, then, encompasseth divers qualities pertaining to visible creatures, of which the first is mass, the second beauty, and the third utility. Thy spiritual touch shall find in the first

* Ecclus. xviii 1. † Gen. i 1.

admiration, in the second approbation, and in the third help. For the first of them, mass, claimeth as its own number and size: number in similarity, in diversity, and in things blent; size in bulk and weight, and in space, which hath length, breadth, depth, and height.

Witnesses of number are the stars of heaven, sands of the sea, drops of rain, days of the year, hours of the day and minutes of the hour, pelt of beasts, fowls' feathers and sheenful scales of fish, seeds in the furrow, leaves on the trees, and the like. Of size there be witnesses in the height of hills and depth of dales, the course of rivers, the wide welkin and rolling plain, the bottomless gulf, and countless similar things. Furthermore, beauty draweth thee to admiration, in which these four things are comprehended: place, movement, shape, and condition; while utility in creatures is shown forth by these four things: fitness, profitableness, agreeableness, and necessity. Thou canst not but be struck with wonder and admiration, thou that dwellest in thy cell, when thou meditatest busily upon these things, alone by thyself.

The heedful contemplation of visible and tangible creatures of God will be to thee a great and prevalent cause and occasion of wonder, for in them, in a certain manner,

is seen that Wisdom who is invisible, who can be seen as he is by no one in this present darkling state of exile. Whence cometh that which hath been said of Wisdom: *She showeth herself to them merrily in the ways.** The *ways* of this invisible Wisdom are those very visible and perceptible creatures, in which ways she showeth herself, inasmuch as, in some sort, she appeareth in her works, while yet she herself remaineth hidden from us. And meetly is God—that is, Wisdom itself—said to show himself *merrily*, since there is a certain mirth in delight at the sight of the Creator as seen in his works.

Behold, then, in thy meditation the four elements and the whole universe made out of them. See the crawling creatures that be under the earth; the things that spring forth from the earth, that swim in the waters, that light us from the skies, and all whatsoever that by God be bodily and visibly created, formed and ordained, and know thou that these be those *ways* of that Wisdom which is invisible wherein he *showeth himself merrily*.

Wherefore, if thou busily muse upon all these foresaid things, verily shalt thou have wherewith in thy meditation to be struck with wonder and admiration.

* Wisd. vi 17.

CHAPTER XI

OF THE EIGHTH MANNER OF MEDITATION, IN WHICH THOU ART TAUGHT TO TAKE HEED TO THREE GHOSTLY VOICES, AND OF THE FIRST OF THEM

TIME it is now that we should enter upon that eighth manner of meditation wherein, as we said before, things ghostly and invisible are turned over in the mind of him that meditateth. These things aforesaid, whereof we are now to speak, which be ghostly and invisible, pertain either to man's soul, or to the angels, or to the divine nature itself. It is our purpose, then, in that which followeth here immediately to say somewhat of all three.

Thou dweller in thy cell—being there alone, yet not alone—prick up that ghostly hearing which, as I said before, there is in thy heart, and it shall hear these three ghostly voices, the first of which is our own, the second of angels, and the third of him that made both of them. Each of the foresaid spirits hath his own proper voice, and thou hearest the sound of each of them when thou meditatest upon them busily and purely.

In thy deep meditation upon these things see how man is made from twain substances,

the one fleshly, but the other ghostly. In so far as he is fleshly, he pertaineth to the nature common to the rest of animals; but in his mingled form he differeth from the rest of animals, for their bodies they carry bent downwards, prone towards the earth, by which there is signified that all their desires are of the earth, earthy. But man's body standeth up straight and holdeth itself upright, since man, differing from the rest of animals, goeth straight and holdeth himself up; which thing openly declareth that he ought to savour the things that are above, and bend all his mind thither where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God the Father. Thus is man admonished, even by his bodily form, that he differeth from the rest of animals in the goods he should seek, although he have a common fleshly nature with theirs.

But inasmuch as he hath a soul, he hath not community of nature with the rest of animals. For alone after the image and likeness of God is man's soul made—yet not of one nature with God's, but far different from it, since man's soul is capable of growing better or worse; hence it is subject to change, and in that it is far different from God, albeit man's soul hath the natural simplicity of its own being, for with it to be is to live. Furthermore, it hath free will, whereby it

discerneth between good and evil, and it chooseth whether of the two it will have, unto its own proper merit. Lo, here, in man's soul, simplicity of essence, perpetuity of life, and freedom of will.

CHAPTER XII

OF THE SECOND GHOSTLY VOICE, WHICH IS THAT OF GOD'S ANGELS IN HEAVEN

AND now may it please thee, thou dweller in thy cell, that I should say somewhat of the forementioned heavenly spirits, since thy conversation ought specially to be with them by purity and eager desire. For thou must not suppose, when thou art close locked in thy cell, that thou art then alone; for thou art never less alone than when alone—at least, we may say so, if thou dwell there as thou oughtest to do. Art thou alone when, shut up within the swept and garnished chamber of thy mind, with the door of thy heart fast barred against profitless things, thou prayest to thy Father in secret? Art thou alone when, in the inner sanctuary of thy soul, all wanton and heedless thoughts clean put away, and pacing with solemn and unwearied step of thine enlightened intellect and warm affections, thou surveyest and goest the rounds of that mansion of blessed spirits

who *in heaven ever see the Father's face*?* How art thou alone when in the wide and swept great courts of thy soul, all lit up and bathed in sunny warmth as they are, not without unspeakable joy and rapture, thou strayest at will amid the ranks of the patriarchs, the company of the prophets, the senate of apostles, amid the glowing roses of the martyrs, the fair violets of the confessors, the sweet and fragrant lilies of the virgin choirs? How goodly it is for us to be here!

Now at length, most beloved, thou dweller in thy cell, as far as thou mayest, turn thy back upon earthly, lower things; set thy face towards everlasting things in heaven above, and lift up the cogitations of thy heart to those thoughts which are meet to be considered and kept in mind concerning these foresaid heavenly beings.

From out the deep of nothingness were they drawn into being by the will of God, the almighty Maker of all things. Not with him, indeed, are they co-eternal nor co-equal nor consubstantial, for they are his creatures. They were created at the world's beginning, when first the heavens and the earth were made; and they were all created at once, both the good who stood faithful, and the bad who fell away, just as in one moment

* Matt. xviii 10.

the fallen were cast down from heaven, and the good established there for ever.

The office of good angels is twofold—to wit, the divine worship, in which they remain ever occupied; and the ordering of manifold works in this world, either in mankind's favour or in other ways whatsoever, in which they fulfil the divine ordinances. As concerning mankind, their ministry consisteth in serving him with benefits both of body and soul. And this they accomplish without travail whatsoever, yet not purely by their force of will—for this is of God alone, with whom to will is to do—but by a certain seen or unseen act which is proper to them.*

The ranks of these foresaid blessed spirits are divided into three hierarchies, of which every one containeth three orders. In the first hierarchy are these three orders: seraphim, cherubim, and thrones. In the second, dominations, principalities, and powers. In

* Angels, being pure spirits, can have no mode of operation beyond what is of intellect and will. The difference between their manner of acting on the material world and God's is this, that while the action which God exercises immediately may extend to a change of " form " in the creature affected, that of the angels is confined to " local motion," whereby they can apply only natural forces, in such a way as to produce a substantial change in the creature. *Cf. Summa Th.* I, Q. cx, art. 2 and 3; *Quodl.* vi, art. 2; *Ibid.* ix, art. 10, ad 2; *Mal.* Q. xvi, art. 2, ad 14; *Pot.* Q. vi, art. 7, ad 12.

the third, virtues, archangels, and angels. For what reason and cause they have obtained these names is sufficiently known by the showing of Catholic doctors, whence it is not needful that we should say anything thereon at this present time.

But to turn to thyself—thou dweller in thy cell—for whom we here rehearse all these things; as far as thou canst—yea, as far as ever may be given thee to do—lift up the clear and simple sight of thine eyes unto these nine orders of blessed spirits, so that in some sort thou mayest behold their majesty and worthiness. Busy thyself to know how in the tranquillity of uninterrupted peace and the safety of perfect security all of them, pure and serene as they are, see God face to face, being unbrokenly knit to him without go-between. See how, in the fulness of true and never-failing love and exultation, they break forth into songs and laudings of God, and—to sum up many things in a word—how nothing that is good is lacking unto them. What ghostly mirth and sweetness is in these words!

Wert thou an eagle—nay, since thou art one if thou live as thou shouldst—rise, rise, I say, far above all lower things and lift thyself up, by thine inward strength, to that of which we are speaking—things high and mighty, perfect and spotless, tranquil and

peaceful, sure and certain, mirthful and happy, blithe and pleasing, lightsome and bright, sweet and gracious, and—since these are but words—full of all that is desirable and utterly free from what is to be eschewed, which things are loftily on high. Aye, build thee a nest in the heights, and, dwelling amid the rocky land of rugged crags and pathless peaks, there contemplate thy heavenly prey.

When thou sittest in thy cell abiding in pure meditation of these blessed spirits, and with full love and desire representest them to thyself, know thou that the King hath *led thee into his wine cellar and set in order charity within thee ;** yea, thou mightest with St Paul say, *our conversation is in heaven,*† or that other: *He hath made us to sit together in the heavenly places through Christ Jesus.*‡ Paul was then, perchance, held in prison when he testified that he sat in heavenly places with Christ; but verily his dwelling was then, as Gregory saith, where his burning mind had its stay, and not there where of necessity his sluggish body still held him fast.§

Go thou and do likewise, thou dweller in thy cell, and then shalt thou be able, when

* Cant. ii 4. † Phil. iii 20. ‡ Ephes. ii 6
§ *Morals on Job*, lib. vi, cap. xvi, *P.L.*, t. 75, col. 742.

thou returnest to us, giving glory to God, to recount for us that, having built thy nest in the heights, and having dwelt among the rocks, thou didst abide amid rugged crags, and that from pathless peaks thou hast beheld thy reward.

CHAPTER XIII

OF THE THIRD GHOSTLY VOICE, WHICH IS THAT OF GOD HIMSELF

We have now attained unto that point, thou dweller in thy cell, where it behoveth us to discourse together of the invisible things of God himself. Of which same things the great preacher Paul saith: *The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.** Verily these *invisible things* are none other than that which he is himself. Whence the Apostle, that he might instruct us as to our manner of thinking of such *invisible things*, addeth: *his eternal power also and divinity ;*† for eternal power and divinity are none other than he is himself, who is the everlasting God.

But now that we are to speak of God, power faileth us to describe that which he is,

* Rom. i 20. † *Ibid.*

since man's natural wit is unmeet for this work; for that which we are unable to comprehend with our mind, we may not express with our tongue. Verily, all that is, either is God himself or else of the creation he hath made; but so far distant are his creatures from his own proper being, that it may be said, in a certain manner, that they are not, but he only is. He is Maker of all things that are, hence it is certain that he is not a creature. Thou dweller in thy cell, mark thee that we know how to say that which God is not, but who can say that which he is? Of this matter, in this fashion saith Denys the Areopagite: "We comprehend not God's high essential, invisible, and ineffable endlessness. If, therefore, in things pertaining to God, negation be true but affirmation incomplete, it followeth that the declaring of God by dissimilar being is more suitable for the hiddenness of secret things."* True, then, is our negation, when we say of God, "He is not this nor that," since we do know that which he is not; but incomplete our affirmation when we say of him, "He is this or that," since we know not that which he is.

Yet, although we know not *what* he is,

* Migne, *P.G.*, iii, col. 156. See also Denys the Carthusian, *Opera omnia*, t. xv, p. 33 (text) and p. 45 (commentary).

we do know that he *is*, for to one of his chosen servants he affirmed his existence, when he said: *I am who am.** Yea, perchance in saying that *he is*, by that very word he taught us that which is he, inasmuch as that he affirmed that he is. For whatsoever may be believed of him by Catholic faith, whatsoever may be said of him with truth, is by *him that is* set forth when he declareth, *I am.*†

Lo, in thy cell, without let or hindrance, thou burnest with love for God; thou prayest unto him devoutly and desirest to come into God's inmost heart; but in all this loving, praying, and longing of thine, what dost thou imagine God to be? Thou knowest him to be invisible, while no creature is invisible unto him—he that is beginning which never began, and end which hath no ending. He is high above all, yet is not uplifted; he upholdeth all things, yet underlieth them not; he is within and without, yet knoweth no bounds; he is ever and everywhere, yet knoweth neither time nor place. But what place is without him? From him, and by him, and in him, to him be glory. To whom? *To the King of Ages, immortal, invisible, the only God.*‡

* Exod. iii 14.

† *Cf. Epistle of Privy Counsel*, in *Orchard Books*, 4, p. 194.

‡ 1 Tim. i 17.

III

OF THE THIRD RIVER, THAT IS CALLED TIGRIS

CHAPTER XIV

OF THE GHOSTLY SENSE OF THAT NAME TIGRIS, AND OF HOW WE OUGHT TO COME INTO GOD'S PRESENCE AT PRAYER

IN our crossing of the second river that is called *Gihon*, we have made some stay. But I trow we have given no cause to be chidden for our long abiding there, nor yet cause of wonderment, since no one is ignorant of that river's greatness, nor width of its banks, nor depth of its stream. But now let us come to the third river which goeth forth from Eden, and which is called *Tigris*, in order to ford it.

We have already said that, in the figurative sense, this river called *Tigris* is to be understood of devout prayer, just as by the foresaid *Gihon* we understood pure meditation. Somewhat have we said, thou dweller in thy cell, of the different kinds of meditation, and would that what we have said might be as full of profit to thee as it hath been lengthy to us in the telling!

But now our task is to tell thee somewhat of devout prayer, which among all exercises wherein thou busiest thyself in thy cell is the most often and customable thou art wont to have.

But what knowledge or potency have we, so as to be able to say anything hereupon for thy good? Nay, thou hast need rather of that unction from on high which teacheth all things, than of our learning, for the Apostle saith that *we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings.** Would that he petition for us, since those for whom he petitioneth he maketh into petitioners themselves; would that it might so come about of his mere gift and the inpouring of his grace, that we knew how to pray aright!

Do we pray aright when in prayer, for the most part naught, or at best, very little—and that rarely—of all that which we utter with our lips we have in our heart? and thus become like unto those of whom our Lord spake by the mouth of his prophet: *This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.*†

In his *Rule for Clerks*, St Austin saith: "When thou prayest to God in psalms and hymns, let that be turned over in thy heart which thou utterest with thy lips."‡ And the blessed man Bennet thus speaketh in his *Rule for Monks:* "Everywhere do we believe the divine presence to be, and that the eyes of the Lord behold the good and

* Rom. viii 26. † Isa. xxix 13.
‡ *Ep.* ccxi 7; *Rule*, ch. 3; *P.L.*, t. 32, col. 1379.

the bad in every place. But chiefly, and without doubting, do we believe this to be when we are assisting at the *Opus Dei*. Let us, then, ever be mindful of that which the prophet saith: *Serve ye the Lord in fear ;** and again: *Sing ye wisely ;*† and furthermore: *I will sing to thee in the sight of the angels.*‡ Therefore, let us consider what should be our behaviour in God's presence and that of his angels, and so assist in the psalmody that our mind accord with our voice."§ " If when we wish to make any request to men in power, we presume not to do so, but only with lowliness and reverence, with how much more lowliness and purity should we prefer our petitions before the Lord God in all things. And not in much talking, but in purity of heart and compunction even to tears, we should know that we shall be heard. Prayer, therefore, ought to be short and pure, unless peradventure, by divine inspiration, it be prolonged." ‖

Lo, here thou hast the opinion of these renowned men upon this matter. But, oh, what misery! When we pray—nay, when we cheat ourselves into thinking that we pray—

* Ps. ii 11. † Ps. xlvi 8.
‡ Ps. cxxxvii 1. § *Rule*, ch. xix.
‖ *Ibid.*, ch. xx. The reader will find the passage fully commented in Butler, *Benedictine Monachism*, p. 58; and Delatte, *A Commentary*, trans. McCann, pp. 185 *seqq*.

ofttimes are we weighed down heavily with sleep, or else our unstable thoughts, not so much often as nigh always, wander amidst idle and trifling things—yea, more, things hurtful and unprofitable. Should we then think our prayer to be acceptable to God, no doubt there is but that we should deceive ourselves.

When our Lord, in speaking to his Apostles, urged them to pray, he said: *Watch ye and pray.** He saith first of all, *watch*, whereby he teacheth us that, if we would have our prayer to be pleasing to God and not be barren of profit to us, we should with all care and travail watch in prayer against diversity and unstableness of thought and against hurtful and useless thoughts, both before the time of prayer and most of all while at prayer. Unhappy our lot! for how well hath it been said: *There was silence in heaven as it were for half an hour ;*† not for so much as one full hour is there stability and quiet in the soul, which is meant by that *silence in heaven*, but only for half an hour. What great disorder of heart this is, a disorder which is incurable so long as the corruptible body weigheth down the soul whose earthly tabernacle is heavy unto holy meditation.

* Mark xiv 38. † Apoc. viii 1.

CHAPTER XV

HOW THE REMEDY AGAINST INSTABILITY OF MIND IN PRAYER IS TO BE FOUND IN THIS RIVER TIGRIS

BUT peradventure thou that dwellest in thy cell answerest me thus: "Thou hast made me solicitous and very fearful by thy words, for all thou sayest, in that manner wherein thou sayest it, not only understanding, but daily—yea, hourly—experience telleth me to be true. What profit, then, is it to tell me that I am troubled by a malady unless at the same time thou show me how I may be cured? Tell me, therefore, I beseech thee, according to thy wit, how I should appear before God in prayer, so that I may offer it to him in an acceptable manner."

This shall be our manner of answering unto thee: "He himself telleth thee silently within thy heart, without whose gifts neither may thy prayer be acceptable to him nor profitable to thee, he whose only word accomplisheth that which he speaketh. Maybe that he will speak to thee even by our ministry, although to us it is not given to speak of such things without our own great confusion and shame; for is it not a matter of shame unto us to teach that which we ourselves have not learnt?"

Unto thine edification, then, thou that dwellest in thy cell, we shall endeavour to explain—as thou knowest we did already before, and again according to the figurative sense—this third river *which goeth out of Eden* as pure and devout prayer.

This river, as sacred history testifieth, is called *Tigris*. Now by *Tigris* is meant an arrow—like pure and devout prayer—which goeth swiftly, pierceth and penetrateth, tearing its passage before it, and coming to its mark. So, verily, as a swift arrow in its flight doth prayer mount upwards even unto God himself. *The prayer of the just man shall pierce the clouds*,* for what can prevent it? It fighteth against all things whatsoever that war against us and are contrary to us and hurtful; it overcometh and extinguisheth. And peradventure this is why it is said of this river that it *passeth along by the Assyrians*,† for by the people of the Assyrians is to be understood, I trow, all whatsoever worketh our ghostly hurt. Should the boisterousness of temptation weary us, should it happen—as at times falleth out—that the grievous burden of some raging adversity bear us down, against the like and all such *Assyrians* as are in this world this river *Tigris* goeth forth, for prevalently the simplicity of devout prayer doth oppose itself against them,

* Ecclus. xxxv 21. † Gen. ii 14.

although they should press in upon us from many sides.

This, then, is that third river which *goeth forth from Eden*, which even until our own days still goeth forth—but in ghostly fashion —*against the Assyrians*.

Lo, here, the greatness of comfort and help the power of prayer bringeth us against all our adversaries, against all hurtful things, when we bend our minds to it, as it behoveth us to do; so that it is clear to us that in no-wise doth Holy Writ say without reason that *Tigris passeth along by the Assyrians*.

"But what is that manner wherein we should bend our minds to prayer?" Thou dweller in thy cell askest what it may be, knowing how profitable it were for thee to learn it, but more profitable still to perform it in deed and truth, by experience thereof. Nay, this shouldst thou not ask of us, but of one that hath experience thereof, for that which prayer verily is, only experience teacheth. Howbeit, since thou constrainest us to say somewhat thereon, we shall rehearse unto thee whatsoever the Lord may grant us to tell, since we have no desire to pass for a philosopher, which peradventure might be were we to keep silence.

CHAPTER XVI

THREE THINGS ARE NEEDFUL FOR PROFITABLE PRAYER, AND OF THE FIRST OF THEM

WELL, then, if thou wouldst pray profitably, it seemeth to us that there be three things that it behoveth thee heedfully to consider:

The first is, how thou comest to thy prayer.
The second is, how thou presentest thyself before God during it.
The third is, how thou behavest thyself, the time of thy prayer being over and done.

Now, that we may treat of the first of them in this chapter, since there is not place to deal with all of them in this one chapter—in order, I say, before all else, to speak concerning the first of these foresaid necessary things for prayer—we admonish thee with all earnestness, thou dweller in thy cell, with might and main, in season and out of season; we enjoin upon thee, that when thou draw nigh to adore the Lord thy God, and most of all, when thou think to come to the offering of the sacrifice of the Son to his Father, wherein there is contained God reconciling the world unto himself in Christ, that thou

have busily in mind, and know without doubt, that since "in every place the eyes of the Lord are upon the good and the bad," then verily, above all times else, thou appearest in God's sight and that of his holy angels there present with all his saints. And when thou offer the sacrifice of prayer unto God, that thou presentest thyself both to him and to those blessed spirits of the heavenly courts —yea, even all the saints—both when alone, yet not alone, thou dwellest in thy cell, and likewise when thou prayest in choir in others' company. Now if this be so—nay, because it is so—watch thou busily how thou comest to thy prayer and in what manner it behoveth thee to show thyself at thy coming thither. So, coming to thy prayer, make all due effort and with all thy might endeavour to bring thither a heart entirely pure, so that thou mayest offer thy prayer to God in an acceptable manner, and to thine own profit.

But how shall I perform this, dost thou ask? Hear thou and understand, and, hearing and understanding, perform it verily in deed. Let it be thy care to cast from thee whatsoever pricketh thy conscience, whatsoever thy conscience may accuse thee to have done amiss either in thought, word, or deed; first by hearty sorrow, then by pure, humble, and sincere confession, and full satisfaction,

with the purpose, by God's grace, to amend thee and rid thee of it for the future.

If, on the contrary, however, thou seest some good to be in thee, know thou most certainly, before all else, that this good taketh not its origin from thee. And, furthermore, thou art not ignorant that the all-just and strict Judge *will search Jerusalem with lamps*.* Rather do thou let Reason hold a strict Chapter of Faults within the house of thy soul; let Conscience, which knoweth not forbearance, nor silence, nor concealment, make the proclamations; and let thy Mind abstain from even the shadow of excuse, defence, denial, or other shift; nay, rather, doffing the frock of silent reserve with which it were hitherto clad, let it stand stripped naked by sincere confession, and lowly humbling itself under its own strict judgement, let it step forth in the presence of Reason, president of the chapter, prepared and ready to receive the discipline of condign satisfaction.†

* Soph. i 12.

† The metaphor is taken from a monastic meeting in chapter, either daily or at intervals, when the religious accuse themselves openly, or in some cases are "proclaimed" by their brethren, of external faults against rule or custom of their house. Excuse or denial, except under the most exceptional circumstances, is not permitted, and if the fault were sufficiently grievous, the culprit, in the Middle Ages

All this, thou dweller in thy cell, should be thy customary manner of acting; but more especially shouldst thou put it into execution when thou shapest to come to prayer, for the Psalmist saith, in his own person, that if he should see iniquity in his heart the Lord would not hearken unto him; but he addeth: *Therefore hath God heard me, and hath attended to the voice of my supplication,** understanding, since that I have not seen iniquity in my heart, God hath heard and attended unto me.

If thou wert to perform these things which we have now rehearsed, and in the manner in which we have told them, trust thou merrily that thy prayer will be heard of God, for that thou seest no iniquity in thy heart; if in a manner hitherto it had its dwelling-place there, it hath been clean taken away.

CHAPTER XVII

FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS ON THE SAME SUBJECT

When you shall pray, saith our Lord, *forgive if you have aught against any man*,† and again: *If you will forgive men their offences, your*

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at least, stripped to the waist and kneeling before the president of the chapter, received a certain number of strokes with birch, or discipline.

* Ps. lxv 19. † Mark xi 25.

*heavenly Father will forgive you also your offences. But if you will not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your offences.** Lo, thou hast heard, thou dweller in thy cell, both the exhortation and the warning that our Lord addresseth unto us; very profitable, I confess, is the exhortation, but terrible his warning: If we forgive, we shall be forgiven; but if we forgive not, neither shall we be forgiven. Behold how it lieth in our own will whether grace smile upon us or anger lower. So, then, when thou come to prayer, forgive that thou mayest be forgiven, and forgive in that measure wherein thou desirest forgiveness for thyself.

Thou askest, peradventure: What meaneth this word "to forgive"? Our answer shall be: This is to forgive: to cast out of thy memory all that may have been said or done against thee unjustly by another, so that there remain no trace of it within or without thee. For shouldst thou turn over in memory anything soever that hath been said or done against thee in a disturbed and angry fashion and seekest occasion of revenge, or if thou wert to rejoice at misfortune falling upon thine enemy at another's hands, and not at thine own, we are bold to say that thou forgivest not. Nor verily, so long as thou feelest such

* Matt. vi 14, 15.

movements to be busy within thee, canst thou come profitably to thy prayer.

This is a hard saying, thou dost perchance proclaim, *and who can hear it?** When I forgive, am not I truly forgiving so long as I feel such movements within me? If thou wilt listen patiently to us, we will tell thee when it is that thou forgivest.

When thou beholdest with kindly eyes him that hath trespassed against thee in word or deed, without recalling his misdeed, and speakest to him with perfect good-will and kindliness, and, likewise, makest no bitter mention, either in his presence or absence, of that which he hath done against thee, then, verily, it is to be believed that thou hast forgiven. And if thou remember the fact, but art stirred to no pain thereat, again we tell thee that thou hast forgiven; for ofttimes, when merry, we remember past sorrows, and when wholly sound in body we recall without pain that we were once upon a time in bad health. But, to make an end of all this, then verily do we trow thee to have forgiven when, while remembering that thou hast suffered such things, thou dost rejoice and make merry, in this imitating him that said that he *gladly gloried in his infirmities, that the power of Christ might dwell in him.*†

* John vi 61. † 2 Cor xii 9.

CHAPTER XVIII

FURTHER COUNSEL ON THE LIKE MATTER

FURTHERMORE, even as thou willest not to have anything against thy neighbour, it is likewise needful for thee that thou permit not anyone to have anything against thee, insomuch as thou canst and it lie in thy power, so that thou shouldst fulfil that behest of our Lord: *If thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee, leave there thine offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother ; and then coming, thou shalt offer thy gift.** Lo, here thou hast that which Gregory saith: "A gift is not accepted unless first thou banish discord from thy heart."† Whereby thou mayest understand, that it behoveth thee no less to put away discord from thy brother's mind, if he have somewhat against thee, and whom thou hast grieved, than to put it away from thine own heart, thou who hast grieved him. *Leave thine offering*, he saith, *and go first to be reconciled to thy brother.*‡

Thou canst and ought to do so if thy brother whom thou rememberest to have somewhat

* Matt. v 23, 24.

† *Hom. in Ezech.* lib. i, hom. viii; *P.L.*, t. 76, col. 858.

‡ *Ibid.*

against thee is at hand. But should he be far away, at a distance from thee, so that, upon remembrance of the matter, thou art unable to go to him at once in bodily fashion, do that in intention in the presence of him that is *the searcher of hearts*,* that thou wouldst do in verity—though thy brother is far away—were he present. And so shalt thou continue to do until such time as it happen that thou have thy brother truly present to thee, and then thou must do openly, that which thou now doest secretly, in thy brother's absence, but in God's presence.

"And how shall I perform this," dost thou ask? Hearken and observe how thou must do it. Although he be far from thee bodily, in thy heart go to thy brother and, with deep humility, true penitence, in spirit and under God's eye—for he is present—bow thyself down, and lowly casting thyself at his feet, and sharply accusing thyself, ask pardon of him with instance, promise amendment for the future, and then, thus reconciled to thy brother, shalt thou come to offer thy gift.

But great discretion there is to be had in fulfilling this divine behest, and some exceptions to be made in obeying it. For we are not to be forced to observe it when we remember that our brother foolishly fancieth that he hath somewhat against us. If, for example, thou

* Rom. viii 27.

correct thy brother for his soul's health on due occasion and time; if thou proclaim him in chapter justly and with charity, and behavest thyself therewith as is becoming and according to rule, and he be disturbed and think that he hath somewhat therefor against thee, we trow that in nowise art thou obliged to go and to be reconciled unto him, for thou hast wrought him no evil; yea, thy will is to do him much good. St Austin in his *Rule for Clerks* writeth thus thereon: "If thy brother had a wound in his body the which he would hide, as fearing the necessity of the surgeon's knife, were it not cruelty on thy part to keep silence thereon, but mercy to publish it abroad? How much more oughtest thou to make that known which might rot in his heart?"* See here how they are cruel who hide the ghostly wounds of their brethren, but merciful they that discover them unto their healing.

Moreover, if a prelate, with a father's affection, should correct one of his subjects for a fault—which he is bound to do from the office that he hath undertaken—thinkest thou that he, too, is bound to be reconciled to his brother if that same brother, wrongfully disturbed thereby, think that he hath somewhat against his prelate? "Not so," thou sayest, "unless he hath exceeded bounds in the manner of his correcting." But we say, not

* *Rule*, ch. 8; *Ep.* ccxi 7; *P.L.*, t. 32, col. 1381.

even then. For oft doth it fall out that, for the greater love he beareth, the more easily he exceedeth in his manner of correcting. Whence St Austin saith in his foresaid Rule, speaking to prelates themselves: "Whensoever the necessity of correcting men's manners oblige thee to use hard words, even shouldst thou remark thyself to have exceeded in manner, no obligation is laid on thee of asking pardon of thy subjects, lest, while behaving thyself in a manner too lowly in their regard whom it behoveth to be subject, the ruler's authority be broken. But pardon for all is to be asked of God, who well knoweth how much good-will thou bearest towards those whom thou correctest beyond measure."*

All this have we rehearsed that we may know, first of all, how we should come to our prayer.

CHAPTER XIX

OF THE SECOND THING NEEDFUL FOR PROFITABLE PRAYER

Lo here, thou dweller in thy cell, thou hast that manner in which it behoveth thee, by God's grace, to prepare thee when thou proposest to come before God in prayer. But now thou askest concerning that to which

* *Rule*, ch. 8; *Ep.* ccxi 7; *P.L.*, t. 32, col. 1381.

before we gave the second place, that we should instruct thee, as far as our wit and skill allow, how thou mayest persevere in prayer, and what thoughts thou shouldst have in thy mind during its course.

I doubt not but that thou knowest—yea, unless we be in error, oft hast thou had experience thereof—that in no other ghostly exercise do we suffer harder travail or doughtier wrestling than when we persevere in prayer—that is, if we busy ourselves to make our prayer such as it ought to be. For then both the great unstableness of our own hearts, and the malice of our ancient enemy, beyond measure do weary and vex us. Whence it is needful for us to know, when we feel such workings within us, how to stable our miserable heart with all our might, and, as far as we may, not permit it to become attached to wandering and foolish thoughts.

Now, if thou wouldst know, thou dweller in thy cell, how to make thy prayer pure—yea, since we know that such is thine eager desire—thou must endeavour with all thy might in time of prayer to reflect upon these four things—to wit:

To whom it is thou prayest;
Him through whom thou prayest;
That for which thou prayest;
Who thou art that prayest.

Marry, thou must open thy heart wide indeed, so as to be able to take in all these four as guests at one moment. How full of joy was the mind of the blessed Bennet, who, at his prayers, seeing the soul of a saint carried up to heaven, saw the whole world gathered together, as it were, under one beam of the sun; so that he might clearly understand that to such a one as seeth his Creator, all created things are narrow.*

So, then, when thou prayest, have before thy ghostly sight him to whom thou prayest. And who is he but God himself? "And what," dost thou ask, "shall I think of when I think of God?" We answer, that thou oughtest rather to be taught this by that masterful unction which teacheth all things than by any learning of man's. Place God before thee and put thyself before him, and, of that great love wherewith thou lovest him above all things, in that unspeakable sweetness which thou feelest to be by him in-shed into thee, in a merry and joyful jubilee, go out of thyself, and, casting self far from thee, attach thyself to him and fast cleave unto him.

But as to how he to whom thou prayest will show himself unto thee when thou prayest to him in pure prayer, thou shalt not ask of us,

* See *The Dialogues of St Gregory the Great* (Quarterly Series), p. 111; also Butler, *Western Mysticism*, p. 123.

since we are totally unlearned in that matter. And our ignorance cometh from this, that very seldom, or never at all, have we had experience thereof. But this we do know, that whoso prayeth with a holy and sincere heart, a heart clean and purged and pure, and with full and perfect love and desire, to him verily doth God make known by some hidden manner of influence his hidden and secret counsels, his sweetness and delights.

CHAPTER XX

FURTHER COUNSEL ON THE LIKE MATTER

FURTHERMORE, in the second place above, we have put that we should busily have in mind him through whom we pray. Who is he but that *Mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus*,* who, in that he is man like unto us, though in a manner far better than us, entreateth the Father for us; and who, in that he is God, along with the Father and the Holy Ghost, with whom he is one God, is our atonement. Lo, here that *golden altar*†—which is the humanity of Christ, in which is naught but that is altogether stainless—upon which we offer our prayers to God the Father, to the end that in him the almighty and most merciful Father may be gracious unto us, with

* 1 Tim. ii 5. † Apoc. viii 3.

whose nature he seeth his divine Son to be united personally, but free from all human guilt.

When thou prayest, therefore, thou dweller in thy cell, thou shalt see with the inner sight of thy soul God's Son, in all things co-equal co-eternal, and consubstantial with the Father and the Holy Ghost; he will appear, I say, when thou abidest in prayer, merrily showing the glory of his victorious humanity in the Father's sight. For Christ, appearing in human nature, is that altar—golden because altogether free from sin—upon which we offer the sacrifice of our prayers to the Father.

This is he, thou dweller in thy cell, through whom thou oughtest to pray to the Father. Therefore, at prayer, cast the strong arms of thy mind about this Advocate of thine, and in that fashion lift him up, in the simplicity of thy heart, before the Father's sight. What is there pertinent to thy salvation that thou canst not obtain when thou presentest such an offering to the Father of mercies, since thou prayest and makest thy petition in the name of his beloved Son, if faith in thee waver not, hope know no despair, nor charity grow not cold?

Be heedful, then, of such things and to the words of thy petition, and then, standing before God almighty and the whole company of heaven, setting before thee thy Surety with

the Father, have busily in thy heart that which thou sayest with thy lips, so that thy voice may be agreeable with thy mind, thy thoughts with that which thou sayest in words.

CHAPTER XXI

A CONTINUATION OF THE SAME DOCTRINE

Now this last is that which we put in the third place here before—to wit, that for which thou prayest. "But," thou sayest, "that may not be performed by all men"—that is, that what their tongue speaketh their mind may at the same time fully comprehend. Nay, this is not to be accounted altogether to instability of their mind, but on account of the ignorance therein. For many men there are that may not come to understanding of all that they say, for although of a truth they have wherewith to speak words outwardly, as regards understanding of it, they have no knowledge of letters.

Sayest thou, then, that in such folk prayer is altogether fruitless in God's sight, in that they understand not in their mind that which their voice telleth openly? Far be it from us so to say. For we trow not that of them was it said: *If any man know not, he shall not be known.** For although such folk have not

* 1 Cor. xiv 38.

learning, nevertheless, if with a devout heart, right intention, and in decent fashion, they pronounce the sacred text, with faith, hope, and charity, I trust that he of his goodness to whom they pray, will, of his own plenty, make good that which they have not, and not allow their ignorance to be for their hurt. For it is not to be supposed that he will demand of them that which he granted them not, and that so great a hurt of their salvation should be permitted, inasmuch as they made no return for that which they had not received.

But though it be that such folk find excuse in these matters, that same excuse can avail thee nothing who hast knowledge and understanding of that which thou sayest in prayer, if, through thine own negligence, thou payest no heed to it. Bend all thy mind, therefore, unto that which thy lips pronounce when thou prayest to God; and not only when thou prayest alone, but likewise when in the psalmody thou hearest others' voices.

In choir, when thou hearest or singest something from the Psalms, or specially when thou readest lessons, let that be in thy heart by understanding which openly thou sayest with thy voice. And when thou listenest to others saying or singing a verse of the Psalms, or specially if they read, pay attention to that which they are saying, and give thy heart with

understanding to that whereto thou payest attention by ear.

And this is how, as we said before, thou shouldst consider for what thou prayest.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER

As to that condition of prayer that we put in the fourth place—to wit, that thou look well unto thyself, what thou art that prayest—thou shalt fulfil it if at prayer to God the Father through his son Jesus Christ thine Advocate, with heart and voice, in that hour, thou heap up thy sins and offences, many and great as they are, and as if digging about an unfruitful tree and dunging it, thou force it to yield fruit, and so thou shalt eat the paschal lamb with bitter herbs.* If in such fashion thou make thy prayer acceptable before God, and with all thine offences *sealed up, as it were, in a bag,*† rejoice and be glad for that *thine iniquity is cured.*‡

Yea, more, if thou wilt act like the publican, who stood afar off and would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, thou shalt after-

* The sense of this reference seems to be the reception of the Holy Eucharist in a contrite spirit. *Cf.* Exod. xii 8.

† Job xiv 17. ‡ *Ibid.*

wards, in a brief span, go down to thy house justified.

But should there occur to thee—as falleth out at times at the instigation of the foul fiend, who ever striveth to do us some hurt, but chiefly is he grievous unto us at times of prayer, so that he may rob us of the profit thereof—should there occur to thee some unlawful thought, such as anger, or agitation, or vanity, or curiosity, or specially some lewd matter, the which violently doth rush in upon thy prayer, in such sort that thou canst not turn away thy mind from it, I counsel thee to desist from that petition wherewith thou art occupied, and by special prayer to set thyself manfully against thine aggressor. And depart not from this martial attitude of thine until, by God's mercy, in his defeat thou find peace again.*

Lo, here be those four things, thou dweller in thy cell, which we exhort thee to revolve in thy mind at the time of prayer, which are: Who he is to whom thou prayest; who through whom thou prayest; that for which thou prayest; and, lastly, who thou art that prayest. In the first, thou beholdest God the Father's unspeakable majesty; in the second,

* Many will doubt as to whether after all this "frontal attack" is the best strategy in the circumstances, and all writers would dissuade from it in the case of "lewd" thoughts.

the boundless compassion of thy Saviour; in the third, a certain tranquil purity and pure tranquillity; in the fourth, thine own infirmity wherewith thou art weighed down both in soul and body.

As concerning that of which we spoke before, since thou oughtest to be taught thereon—namely, how we should behave ourselves after that our prayer is ended—we shall tell thee shortly, thou dweller in thy cell.

It behoveth us, what time our prayer is over and ended, so long as God's grace alloweth, to keep ourselves in that same stillness, discreetness, and purity in which we were. For if we receive back the flowing tide of thought into our hearts, and forthwith return to laughter, to poisonous detraction, and idle talk, great fear there is that such behaviour will be the occasion of our losing the fruit of our prayer. Rather let us, with all care, imitate that woman of whom we read that, praying to God, she *shed many tears . . . spoke in her heart and only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard at all . . . and her countenance was no more changed.**

* 1 Kings i 10-18.

IV

OF THE FOURTH RIVER, THAT IS CALLED EUPHRATES

CHAPTER XXIII

OF THE GHOSTLY MEANING OF THIS NAME, AND OF THE EXERCISE PERTAINING TO IT

LONG have we abode beside the third river called *Tigris*, and, as we hope, not without fruit. For very profitable it is unto thee, thou dweller in thy cell, to know how thou shouldst behave thee at prayer, since it is clear that thou oughtest to give thyself ever and oft to this ghostly exercise.

But now, if thou will, let us leave this third river and go over to the fourth, which is called *Euphrates*, which likewise floweth forth from Eden. Holy Writ telleth not what land it encompasseth, nor what peoples it goeth about —as it saith of *Tigris* that it goeth against the Assyrians—but plainly and shortly it saith, *the fourth river is Euphrates.** And, peradventure, it saith thus because useful and profitable handiwork—to which by interpretation of its name we assign the *Euphrates*—is more common to all manner of people than any of the foresaid ghostly exercises whereof we have treated hitherto, according to their figurative sense—to wit, studious ghostly

* Gen. ii 14.

reading, pure meditation, or devout prayer. For not all those whom we see clothed with the monk's cowl do we find equally fit for the forementioned exercises, so that they might profitably at all times give themselves to ghostly reading, or to long abiding in pure and inward meditation, or busy themselves with devout prayer.

But who is there that is sound in wind and limb that cannot work some good task with his hands, in rhyme and reason?

Since, however, as the Apostle saith, *Godliness is profitable to all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come*,* rightly is it said of two of the foresaid rivers that they *compass certain lands*, and of the third that it *passeth along by the Assyrians*. This godliness, which is profitable, we have assigned to *Phison* on account of application to ghostly reading, to *Gihon*, because of the purity of inward meditation, and to that called *Tigris*, from earnestness of devout prayer. But since *bodily exercise is profitable to little*†—which we understand of *Euphrates*, the fourth river—in that it *hath* some ghostly profit, we assign it as coming forth from Eden likewise. But inasmuch as, unlike godliness, it is *profitable to little*, of this fourth river, by which we understand work, there is nothing said as to what land it encompasseth, or by what

* 1 Tim. iv 8. † *Ibid.*

peoples it passeth along, but only—as we have said already—plainly and shortly, *the fourth river is Euphrates.*

Now, if this may stand—and even, peradventure, if it may not—although it may be understood in some other truer and more convenient fashion, thou shouldst know, thou dweller in thy cell, that for a multitude of reasons it is very necessary that thou shouldst engage, according as may be fitting, proper, and expedient, in some manual work at the appointed hours and times. For manual work taketh away that peevish feeling thou mayest have, and furnisheth thee with a sense of delight; it bringeth thee great good and alloweth not sloth, which is the enemy of the soul, to overcome thee. After work, thou wilt return to the three foresaid exercises of reading, meditation and prayer, with renewed relish and more blithely, just in that measure that thou leave them at times in order to engage in honest work.

If thou ask us to what work thou shouldst give thyself, we shall answer thee shortly, that thou shalt give thyself to that work which thy prior hath enjoined upon thee. One work there is, if verily thy prior hath so ordained, whereto it behoveth thee more specially to devote thyself—to wit, that thou learn the art of writing, if learn thou canst, and if thou canst and knowest how, to employ thyself

in the transcription of books. For this work is an immortal work—a work, if we may say so, that passeth not away, but abideth for ever; work, we would call it, but not labour, a kind of work among all others the most convenient for lettered religious men.

For such religious men, as far as their bodily health permitteth, when not engaged in prayer, reading, meditation, and such bodily needs as may not be altogether forgotten, and not according to their own devices, but either as their superior command them to do or as discretion dictateth—such religious men, I say, should ever be employed either in preparing parchment for books, or in copying them, binding or correcting them, ornamenting or illuminating or titling them, or else engaged in tasks connected with their preparation, their copying, or their completion.

If this be convenient and proper in every order of religion, it is specially suitable in our Carthusian order. What do I say? Suitable? Yea, honourable and fitting, for who is there that can give himself without respite to reading, meditation, or prayer? Therefore, although the ghostly fruit of manual work be wellnigh naught, still it is good for us from time to time to engage in it, with busy instance and instant busyness, in order that we may drive far from us listlessness and idleness, which is inimical to the soul and—as the Wise Man saith—*hath*

taught much evil,* and lest our mind should grow unfit for every profitable exercise.

Moreover, St Paul instructeth us how necessary and wholesome is manual work. For he writeth thus, as thou well knowest: *But we entreat you, brethren, that you abound more, and that you use your endeavour to be quiet, and that you do your own business and work with your own hands, as we commanded you, and that you walk honestly towards them that are without; and that you want nothing of any man's.*† And we know that that which he taught, he likewise carried out in practice, for, saith he: *You yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; for we were not disorderly among you, neither did we eat any man's bread for nothing; but in labour and in toil we worked night and day, lest we should be chargeable to any of you.*‡ In order to show us that he might have behaved otherwise had he so willed, he continueth: *Not as if we had not power; but that we might give ourselves a pattern unto you, to imitate us.*§

Wherefore, we believe that so great a Doctor would not have been willing so earnestly and busily to warn his disciples, had he not known it to be profitable and very wholesome for them so to do. Thou dweller in thy cell, go thou and do likewise; every day that it be

* Ecclus. xxxiii 29.
† 1 Thess. iv 10, 11.
‡ 2 Thess. iii 7, 8.
§ 2 Thess. iii 9.

lawful to work, do something that is useful and pertaineth to the common good—if thou be hale of body—not that which thine own will suggesteth unto thee, but that which is laid upon thee by command of thy prelate; work thou with thy hands merrily and in orderly fashion, according as thou knowest and canst.

Remember that it was the custom, as we read in the monasteries of Egypt, that no one was there received who would not work, not out of necessity, but for avoidance of idleness, which is the enemy of the soul. And blessed Bennet thus writeth concerning this matter in his *Rule for Monks:* "Idleness is the enemy of the soul, and therefore the brethren should be occupied at certain times with manual work and at other times with holy reading."* Lo, here thou hast what great and mighty men have thought concerning manual work; this is what they have left in their writings of that which we have understood, in the figurative sense, of that river which floweth forth from Eden, of which Holy Writ saith: *The fourth river is Euphrates.*

Thou dweller in thy cell, *meditate upon these things; be wholly in these things. Take heed to thyself* and to manual works; *be earnest in them.*† And this specially should be thy

* *Rule*, ch. 48. † 1 Tim. iv 15, 16.

work—as we have said before—that thou givest thyself with all diligence to the copying of books, for this should specially be the task set Carthusian solitaries. To this effect wrote that man of holy memory, never to be named without reverence, Wigo, fifth prior of the hermitage of Chartreuse, in his book of customs of the Charterhouse, in the twenty-eighth chapter thereof: "Almost all whom we receive, if it be possible, we teach the art of transcription." And a little further on: "For we will that books, as being the never-failing food of our souls, be kept with all care, and studiously be copied out, so that we who may not preach with our lips may do so by hand. For as many books as we copy, so many preachers of truth do we seem to set up, hoping for a reward from God for all those who by these means are converted from error or established in the Catholic faith; for all those, likewise, who either shall be turned from sin and vice, or made to burn with desire of the heavenly fatherland."*

Here, then, is what thou shouldst specially engage in for manual work. But thou knowest that the draught we offer thee we have drawn from thine own well; we have clothed thee, but with thine own garments; fed thee, but with food of thine own getting;

* *Consuetudines Guigonis*, *P.L.*, t. 153, cols. 693-694.

our gifts are thine already; and the wealth we have poured into thy lap is the overflow of thine own plenty. And so this much shall suffice thee at this present concerning manual work, which we have understood of that fourth river that goeth out of Eden, of which Holy Writ saith: *The fourth river is Euphrates.*

EPILOGUE

LO, here thou hast that which will be to thee rather matter of memory than of new learning—to wit, how thou, a dweller in thy cell, shouldst engage in these four holy and sanctifying exercises, which are:

Application to ghostly reading;
Purity of meditation;
Devout prayer;
Useful work.

Nothing new have we put into our book, but what is ancient, according to the saying: "Nothing is said that hath not been said already." And the *Preacher* saith: *Nothing under the sun is new, neither is any man able to say: Behold, this is new.* For he addeth: *It hath already gone before, in the ages that were before us.**

Furthermore, we are not conscious of having written anything contrary to the truth. Yet we will not obstinately deny that nothing of what we have written may not, after all, be otherwise than we have said, knowing that good men should see faults where there are

* Eccles. i 10.

none. But it shall be thy wise providence and provident wisdom so to cull the rose that thy hand gather not the thorns; that is to say, in plainer fashion, to have a care to take what is good and avoid altogether what is bad therein.

And now, at length, we make an end of all this, for much indeed have we said, and would that it may be to thee, thou dweller in thy cell, as fruitful in the taking as it hath been lengthy to us in the telling.

With devout humility, and humble devotion, though absent in body, yet present in spirit, we beseech you that should your HOLINESS find somewhat herein from which you may reap some ghostly fruit, that you would be pleased to offer holy prayers for the soul of that miserable sinner who here, not as he should, but as he could, hath gathered these pages together. Amen.

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